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JAIPUR HERITAGE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL 2004

JANUARY 7-21 2004

HERITAGE

National Folk, Regional Performing Arts Plays by walled city schools and other city schools on conservation and heritage, Interactive talks & workshops, walks, Fashion Folk & Food, Street theatre.

CLASSICAL MUSIC AND DANCE

Gala performances by national and international renowned artists... Shubha Mudgal brings the legendary music and story of Meera, afternoon ragaas and dance by Vidhya Rao and Aditi Rao, a magical jugalbandhi between Leela Samson and Madhavi Mudgal, Gala contemporary fusion music performance- Talvin Singh and Sujat Khan, Manjari Chaturvedi with qawaais- sufi kathak, Manjari Asa of the Jaipur Gharana, Nrityagram, Bishwajeet Roy Choudary and Navtej Johar.

CRAFTS & SHOPPING

National Crafts Expo - a large representative of crafts from all over India. Objects of Des best up-market branded handmade gifts, Jaipur Festival Collection a small launch collection of individual pieces for collector, Made For You. Demonstration and sale by young master crafts people.

FACTOR

Dance parties, Late night jazz bands from Mumbai, Fusion music concerts - Euphoria, Eve thing, All musicians jamboree concerts, International bands from the UK underground music scene - A Nawaz - Fun-da-men, A Channija - Swaraj Sonic Guru's & Pathaan, Thierry Robin & Gulabi Sapera, contemporary

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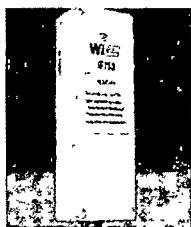
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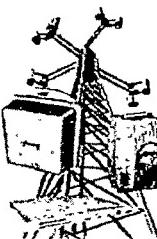


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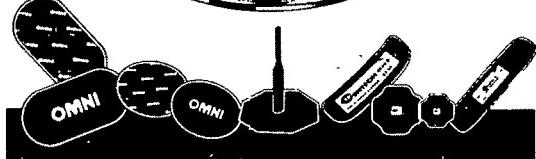
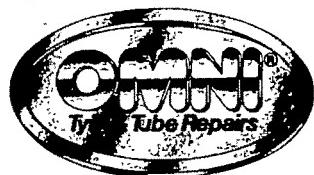
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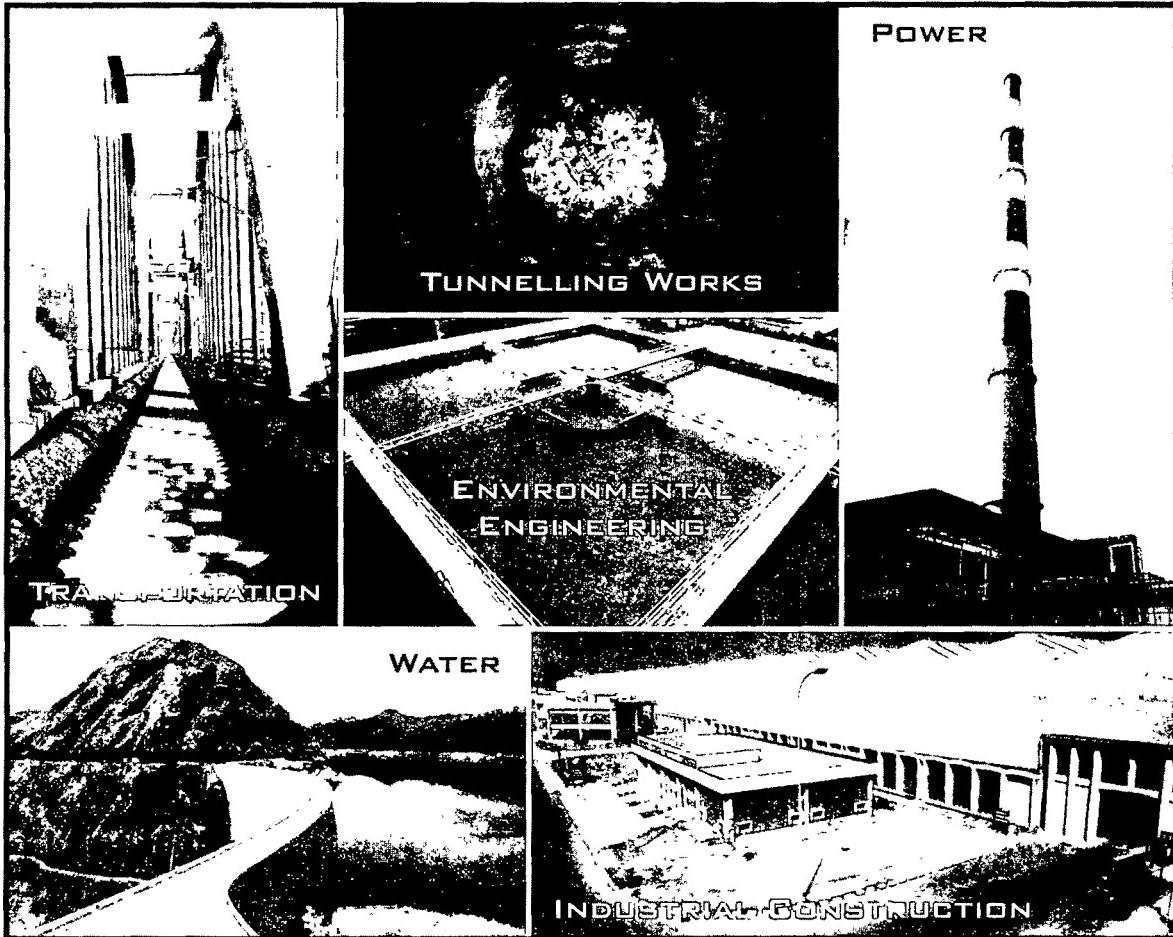


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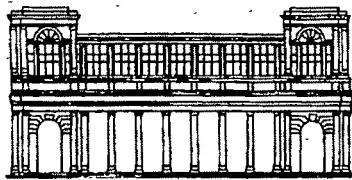
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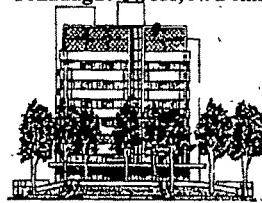


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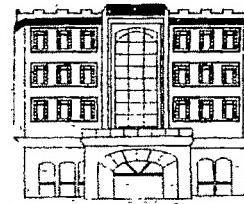


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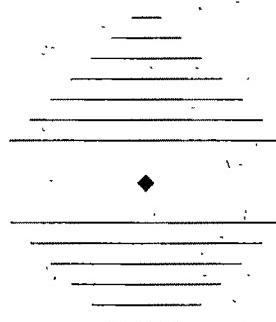


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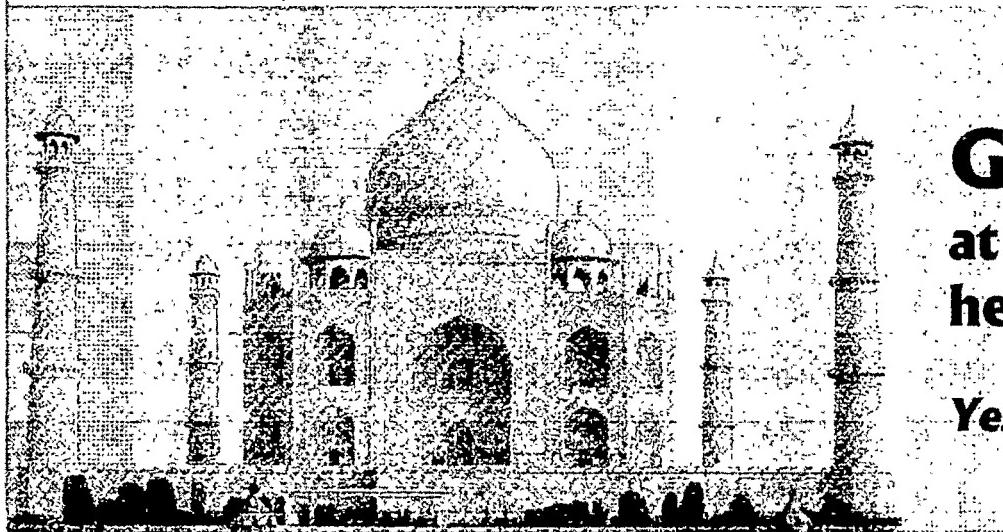
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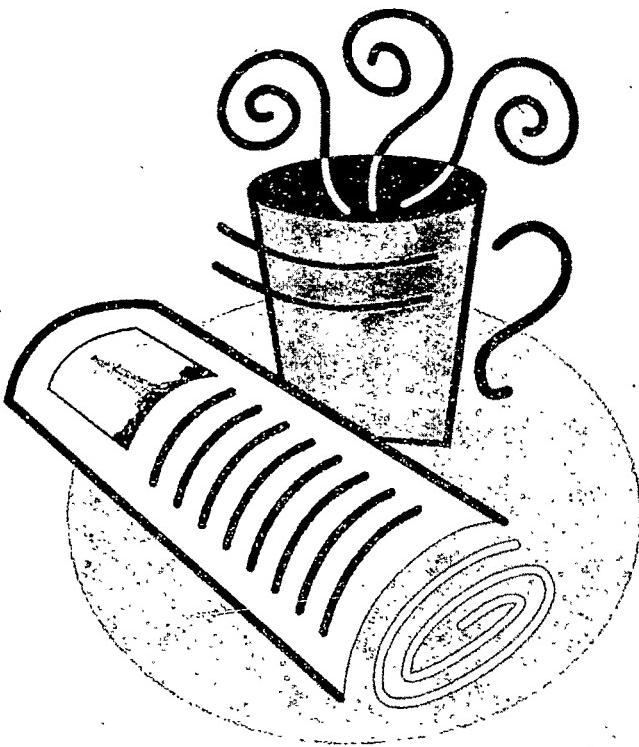
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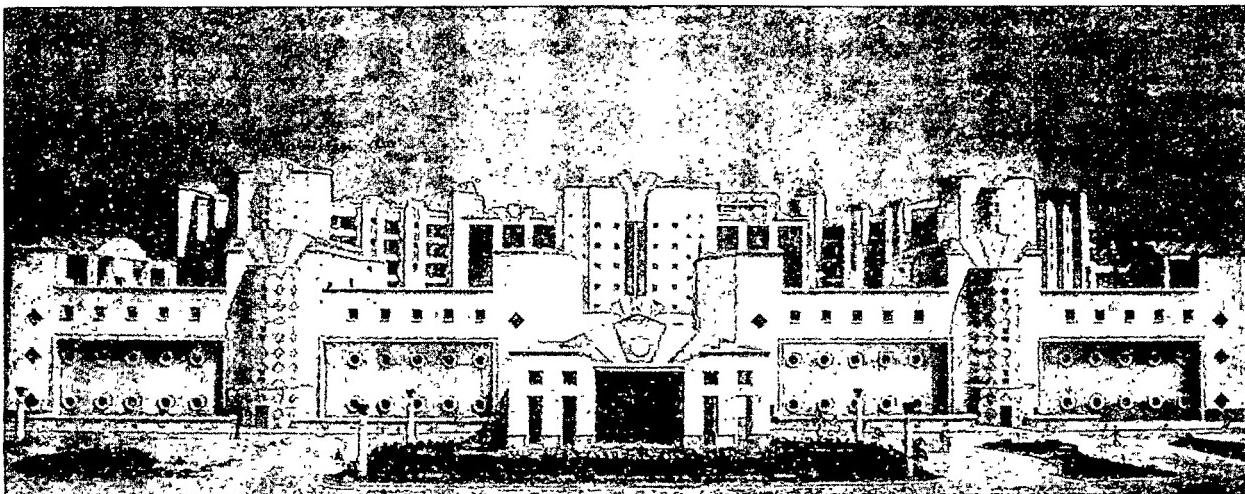
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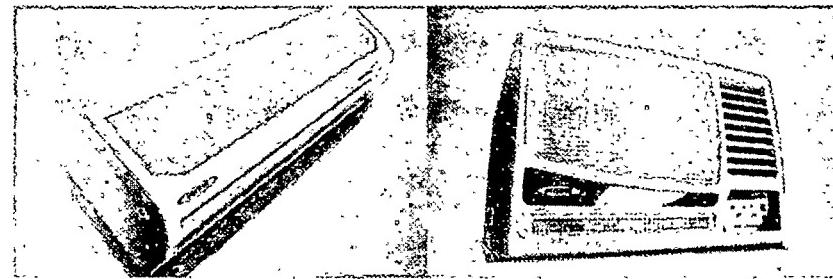
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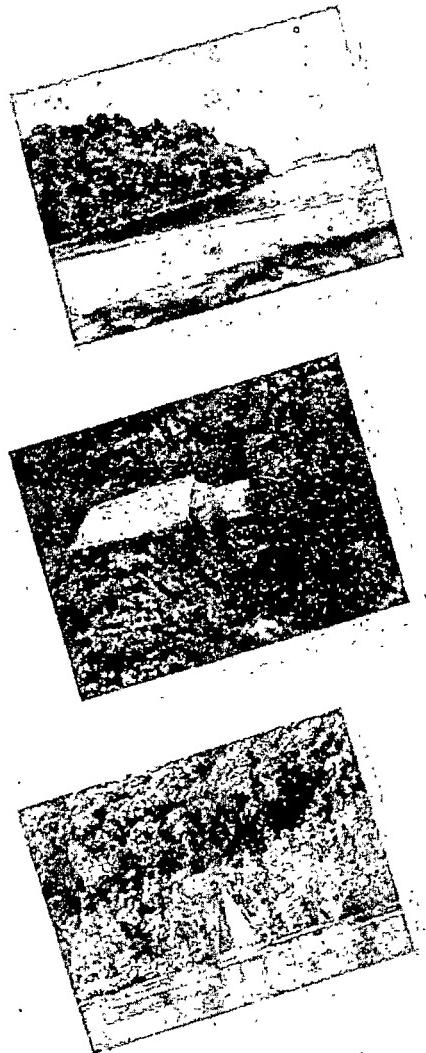
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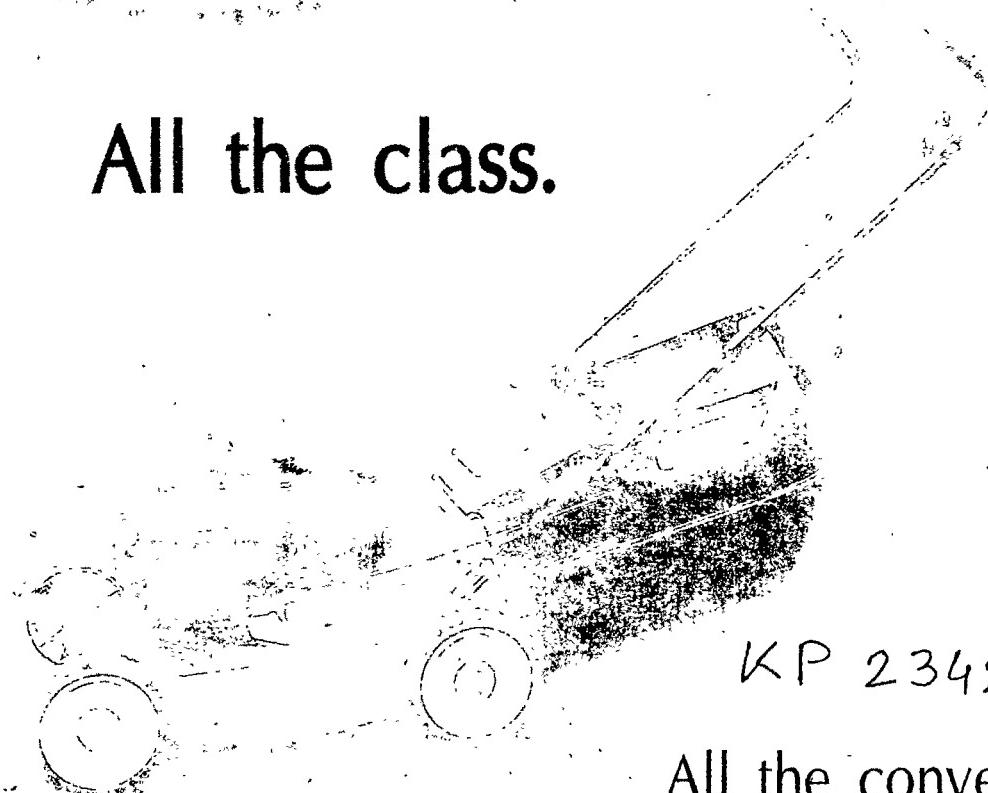
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Branding India

SUNIL KHILNANI

DEFINITIONS of national identity are never fixed, immutable, graven images: they are protean, changeable, fabulous beasts. National identity is a form of story telling, a public narration of tales about who 'we' are, and such identities are remade to suit current tastes and requirements. So, when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee recently announced that 'today the "Made in India" brand is making waves across the globe... there is a big demand for "Bharat Brand", while on TV and in magazines, campaigns advertising 'Shining India' and 'Incredible India' are burning up taxpayers money, we need to ask: what exactly is the brand that is being projected?

In the current debates about the future of the international order, the values and principles that nations embody and seek to project have once again acquired great importance. Today, we live in a world where what has been called the 'battle of ideas', and of images, is a crucial terrain of action. Even countries that have great economic and military power require what Joseph Nye has called 'soft power'; and this is especially true for countries that do not have such material power, as Mahatma Gandhi – an early exponent of such soft power – long ago recognised.

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It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that at the moment when India wishes for a more active presence on the world stage, the world's sense of India, of what it stands for and what it wishes to become, seems as confused and divided today as is India's own sense of itself.

Let me put it in short hand. Is India's future direction embodied and indicated by the present reality of Bangalore? Recently, the magazine *Businessweek* (1/12/2003), in a rather lyrical portrait of Bangalore's shiny research centres, put it thus: 'Except for the female engineers wearing saris and the soothing Indian pop music wafting through... this could be GE's giant research and development facility in the upstate New York town of Niskayuna.' Or, on the other hand, is India's present and future reality captured by the images of horror unleashed in Gujarat last year? The pictures there were of murderous Hindu gangs, led by the rich and educated: doctors, advocates, shopkeepers roved in cars, punched mobile phones and used government supplied computer printouts of Muslim addresses to conduct their systematic mayhem.

In Bangalore, one senses the enchanting promise of technology to transform and uplift lives, to take India forward into the global economy. In Gujarat, one feels the brute fact of technology at the service of state spon-

sored massacres which threaten to drag India back into a dark world of religious bloodshed.

Till its recent implosion, Gujarat epitomized a newly emerging India: its aspirational middle class, with strong links to the outside world and to the large, successful Gujarati diaspora, wore proudly a reputation for industry, entrepreneurship and civic mindedness. The conventional wisdom has it that economic progress and the emergence of a middle class promote moderate and centrist politics, and as such provide the conditions for a liberal democratic politics. Yet Gujarat is a troubling twist to this view.

If we allow that Bangalore represents a possible India, so too does Gujarat. Contrary to some views, Gujarat is *not* an 'aberration' – it would be foolish to try to reassure ourselves in this way. For many it represents the first step in the creation of a *Hindu rashtra*, and what is happening there shows that economic development seems to be entirely compatible with extremist politics.

India seems on the face of it poised between such choices. On the one hand, there is a shrink-wrap, software-package India, where 'brain arbitrage' is the new spice trade and where India is a global brand name advertising the world's electronic 'back office'. On the other, there is a self-inflated, venomous redefinition of India in terms of the ideology of *Hindutva* – where, with mobile phone in one hand and trishul in the other, we see modern technology and medieval weapons turned to lethal ends. A choice between India as Brand Software or as Brand Saffron, between the promise of Bangalore and the threat of Gujarat.

And yet the alternatives are in fact more complicated and especially since 11 September 2001, the calculus of choice must be more nuanced.

We need to examine the nature and stakes of this choice, a political choice, since there is one to be made. It has of late become fashionable to believe that political choices and conflicts are ceding way to economic ones: that economics will integrate and pacify divisions and disagreements.

As India strives to achieve the higher global status it has so long aspired to, it is certainly true that economics will be an important medium for accomplishing that task: it is the ultimate and long-range basis for all state power, and it enables the state to pursue its interests.

But we cannot rely on economics and economic development of itself to do our political thinking for us, either in the short or long term. And this for several reasons. First, we are only at the beginning of a decades-long process of economic development, given the scale of the problems. There are no quick fixes and, in the meantime, we will have to decide what we stand for and what we wish others to see us as standing for: i.e., economics is not going to define Indian identity in the short run. (In fact, economic success will depend on clear political vision). Second, as I've already said, the case of Gujarat makes clear that economic growth is compatible with extremism.

Third, economic growth and development is an instrument or tool; it cannot of itself provide the rationale for a nation to hold together, nor endow it with a distinct identity. There is an independent realm of political values where we have to make choices. And the choices that are made about how we arrange our domestic matters will have direct impact on how we are seen internationally, and so on our global status. Finally, as economic growth kicks in, we will in fact face more real and potential conflicts and confront more urgent and difficult choices.

These domestic political choices will seriously affect how India is perceived internationally and its global standing and influence. We need to be able to define clearly what we stand for, to live this consistently, and to project this forcefully.

In this respect, clearly India does possess one vital and immediately available resource which has imparted to it a distinct identity, and which is a true global currency of political legitimacy: it is a form of political capital that has been amassed over the past five and a half decades. This is represented by the steady operation of constitutional democracy, in a liberal and non-majoritarian form, over this period. We need both to preserve this democratic capital from erosion (at the hands of extremists of whatever hue), to enhance it, and to make use of the 'democracy dividend' which it yields – to be willing to play a role in the global 'battle of ideas'.

It is worth restating the philosophical roots of this form of political capital in order to clarify how it is distinct from the political ideology that is being propagated by some today. These roots lie in the founders' commitment to freedom, as expressed in the value of choice over and against the acceptance of the authority of the past. It entailed a commitment to cultural and intellectual openness, the nurturing of a tradition of free inquiry, rational discussion and argument, toleration of different beliefs and values, a willingness not to sentimentalise about the past, and not to nurture a sense of victimhood and resentment but to be self-critical about one's inheritance.

These commitments were all expressed in the ideology of the national movement, in what I have elsewhere called a tradition of public reason as articulated by Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru. They were also ins-

tantiated in the formal architecture of constitutional democracy as well as in the informal practices that have sustained this. It aligned India with the great project of social modernity set in motion by the critical spirit of the European Enlightenment. And it resulted in the creation of institutions designed to acknowledge the presence of real differences in Indian society, but which also aimed to provide contexts that could transform potentially violent conflicts into moderated, negotiable ones.

So, in committing India to a democratic order, the founders committed us to learning to live with conflict. They avoided the authoritarian temptation associated with totalitarian ideologies, whether secular or religious, which do not allow for recognition of conflicts in their society (more precisely, such ideologies wish to suppress conflict through intimidation and terror), and acknowledged that ultimately all politics is potentially about conflict—conflicts about values, about how to achieve those values, as well as conflicts over interests and how to secure these. But they also tried to show—in the constitutional order they established—that a primary art of politics is the ability to moderate and contain conflicts, to transform them from something base to something richer. That is the alchemical promise of democratic politics. The founders saw that by recognising the presence of differences, often deep-set ones, one might be able to find ways to contain them in ways that actually enhance the overall, long-term stability and viability of the Indian project.

A central test of India's international brand image will be how it deals with its own internal conflicts. And be assured, these will proliferate and multiply in years to come. One illusion we should disabuse ourselves

of is that the anticipated period of economic growth and development will somehow have a pacifying effect, that it will reduce conflicts, and that politics will become less important, replaced by technocratic solutions. This is at best wishful thinking. As the Indian economy grows, as there is more at stake to struggle for and over, so too will potential subjects of conflicts. Economic growth and modernity, especially when it occurs within an already complex society such as India's, is not homogenizing: on the contrary, it will spawn further differences. And, as Indians gain more autonomy over their lives as result of economic prosperity, so too will we see more and more experiments in living, sometimes incompatible and in tension with one another.

I see three important lines of division and conflict in the coming decades: those of the regions and regional states, of caste, and of religion. These represent competing conceptions or visions of India, each of which is challenging the vision set in place by the founders. As such they suggest alternative images of what this nation might hope to be.

Take first the perspective from the regions, and from the rapidly politicising lower castes. This is a powerful and heavily partial view which takes an entirely instrumental view of the Indian Union. Today's regionalism is of course very different from earlier forms (say in the 1950s-60s, or the 1980s): it is not as such threatening of the Indian idea, it is not secessionist. Its leaders: Laloo Yadav, Naidu, Mayawati among others—most drawn from the lower castes, aggressively defend their own class and regional interests. They do not have a coherent view of Indian identity and operate with more restricted horizons.

Take their picture of the economy: they see this basically as a cluster of regional units, each engaged in zero-sum relations with one another, and with the Centre (the caste parties also operate with this picture). In terms of culture, they are also parochial—devoted to tending their own vernacular gardens. The fundamental problem with this view of India is that it offers no coherent national conception of what India is.

The second perspective is that of Hindutva. This of course is an avowedly national perspective, if also a revisionist one. It does think of India as a national unit, and it is fundamentally committed to the aim of creating a Hindu Rashtra, i.e. to transforming the present character of India. There are three central elements to this vision. First, it aims to create 'one nation, one culture, one people'—where this singular culture is based on a selective vision of the past. And this past consists of a glorious Hindu past, symbolised in a picture of the ancient Vedic age. Indian history since that idyllic moment is seen as a series of disruptions and interruptions, and Hindus are portrayed as perpetual victims. Ideologues of this view give great attention to rewriting history, and to rewriting the educational curriculum.

Second, adherents of this view seek to transform the constitutional and legal order of India: to remove legal protections for religious minorities, to abrogate the status of Kashmir and so on. Third, and above all, they argue for a transformation of the long-standing relationship between state and society. The historical pattern of this state-society relationship has always been one in which the state did not interfere in the religious beliefs or cultural practices that were observed in the society: this was generally true of the Mughal state, of the British, and

of the post-47 Indian state. One can of course find some exceptions, but none of these earlier forms wished for wholesale and regular intervention in such matters.

There are numerous ironies that surround this conception, not least that it manifests a reversal of the situation we had in the post-independence decades. In the 1950s and '60s, India had a lumbering command economy of sorts, but also had an open market in cultural and social identities. Today, we are in the era of free market economics but the pressures are towards a command *culture*, where those holding state power wish for their cultural diktats to prevail. If choice is an axiom of the market, how can this be excluded from the realm of religion, culture and identity?

In the Indian and South Asian context, it is conflicts over the relationship between religious identity and the state which have the most dangerous international consequences. Those who fantasize about making India a state with a singular, homogenous religion and culture wish to suppress the fact that India is the second largest Muslim country in the world—and that India contains the largest body of Muslims living within a liberal democratic order. The actions of the Indian state have heavy consequences, both domestically and for the whole sub-continent (which, when one includes Pakistan and Bangladesh, contains the largest concentration of Muslims anywhere in the world).

At a time when the West is embarked on a fraught and intense relationship with Islam, and when Muslims feel increasingly alienated within the international order, the Indian model established in 1947 is a powerful example of how ancient religions can coexist within a single political frame. If India can continue

to deepen its capacity to integrate Muslims into the democratic system, this will be seen by the world as a major success, and confirm India as having an exemplary status in this regard (it is not least from this point of view that the urgency of resolving the Kashmir problem presents itself). But if the Indian model is gradually pushed out of shape and collapses, as many within the Sangh Parivar would like, this will have disastrous consequences both for India and for the region more widely.

The Hindutva definition of Indian identity is in negative terms, contra Pakistan; yet it subscribes to the very two-nation theory that led to partition; it aspires to make India into a Hindu Pakistan. A kind of mirror image – another irony. Where once the founding ideas of India and Pakistan constituted a polarity, today they creep toward a parallel symmetry: one where jihadis mirror Hindu extremists.

Since September 11, the stakes of extremism in whatever form—whether it be terrorists sponsored by Pakistan and operating in Indian territory, or terror inflicted by the elected government of Gujarat on its Muslim citizens – are higher than ever. The *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman has argued that in the post-September 11 world, the crucial polarity is no longer between East and West but between what he terms the World of Order and the World of Disorder. The latter—the failed, rogue and messy states—are the breeding grounds for terrorist and criminal networks, while the World of Order, Friedman has suggested, is constructed around four pillars: the US, the EU-Russia, China and India.

Yet, will India be able to take and sustain a role as a pillar of the World of Order if it adopts a coarse and exclusivist national ideology,

one that would splinter along religious lines India's interconnected diversities and plunge it into internal and international conflict? India remains the one great modernist political success of the non-western world, one of the few that has amassed the political capital of a democratic state which has to a large degree respected internal diversity. It would be a catastrophic irony, both for its own people and for the international order, if it were now to abandon that hard-won commitment to, and practise of, toleration and moderation.

The recognition of conflict, the creation of a context for it that is not destructive, a safe house, is part of the art of crafting a rich and sustainable democracy. Conflict can weaken, but it can also give strength: it can be enhancing, by keeping diversity a live fact rather than merely a decorative feature.

This is contrary to the view that civilizations/nations based on a *single* principle are stronger and better adapted for survival; diversity is a source of strength. We can find this argument of strength in diversity in, for instance, accounts of Europe. The French historian Francois Guizot argued in the early nineteenth century that Europe manifests no single principle: rather, it stood for diversity. This acted as a check against tyranny. Most civilizations have tended to fall under the domination of one value and institution relatively early in their history: but in Europe, one saw a long contest between claims of aristocracy, democracy, monarchy and theocracy. None triumphed completely, resulting in limited government which did not try to enforce a single set of creeds or practices. Now, it is striking to recognise that we can find a very similar account of the distinctive strengths yielded by India's diversity: in the work of Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru.

Those visions of India are to be most suspected which promise us a conflict-free haven: those which promise a singular selfhood, where deep differences are effaced. Utopia created through moral conquest, a religious sanctuary where there is nothing left to enter into conflict with. Such visions of a world without conflict are those which all too often wreak havoc in seeking to realise their vision. We already have signs and premonitions of this havoc. Indeed, the Indian idea has today its own ground zero, at Ayodhya: the rubble-site of the republic.

I began by suggesting the need for more nuance in defining what this idea of India should be, what 'Brand India' is. The challenge is to find a way of making a virtue of India's genuine complexity – to continue to stand for this in a world that is increasingly trying to simplify, polarise, reduce to common denominators (consider the seductive simplicities of the Clash of Civilizations thesis). I also noted how we have to choose this alternative over others being offered: we cannot assume that the workings of economics will make the choice for us, nor can we rely on the coalitional nature of Indian politics to moderate the demands for a homogenised vision of India.

I would like to end by stressing that India can use its acquired political capital to exploit, along with like-minded nations elsewhere, what we can call a 'Democracy Dividend'. The Bush administration has repeatedly affirmed that, in adopting a role as a benign imperial actor in the world, it is acting to put American power in the service of bringing democracy, prosperity and stability to the lands and societies that stretch from Palestine to Indonesia. We should take this claim at its word; and we should remain true to our own, as pledged in our original constitutional order.

Waiting for the Atal decade

HARISH KHARE

ARE we at halfway point in the Atal decade? After the Bharatiya Janata Party's victory in three out of the four states that recently went to polls in the Hindi-speaking northern region, suddenly the prospects of an Atal decade stare us in the face. The BJP has recovered, rightly or wrongly, the sense of political sustainability that it had lost with the collapse of its coalition arrangement with Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. Now a morale-boosting threesome victory has provided it just the momentum that a political party needs in the last year of its five year innings. Unless something dramatic happens – to our leading political players and the principal parties – before the country goes to the general elections in September

2004, if not earlier, the chances are that the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led national democratic alliance (NDA) should get voted back to power.

A number of reasons suggest this scenario, even though the polity remains inherently fractious. By surviving and prospering for more than five years at the Centre, the BJP has come close to displacing the Congress as the principal political party in the country. Admittedly, the BJP still does not have the geographical spread of the Congress, and there are large chunks of the country where the BJP neither has an appeal nor more than a token presence. Still, it has come to convert the Jan Sangh legacy and the Sangh Parivar's perseverance into electoral assets and political advantage.

Further, in three successive national elections – 1996, 1998 and 1999 – the BJP has consistently won more seats than the Congress, even though its vote share was substantially lower (23.75%) than that of the Congress (28.30%). But what the BJP lacks in terms of geographical spread or ethnic representation, it has made up by 'honestly' presiding over the NDA; in the process, the NDA has become the functional equivalent of the Congress as the pan-Indian political party.

On the other hand, the Congress has been out of power at the Centre since 1996 though it shared power with the United Front between 1996–1998 as a junior and outside partner in a coalition arrangement. This is the longest stint of absence from power for the party that still subscribes to a self-image as the 'natural party of governance'. In other words, the Congress is finding it increasingly difficult to retrieve its reputation as the 'only winning game in town.'

For decades the party sustained its brute organizational momentum by

ensuring that those who left its fold or chose to oppose it were left out in the cold; it had the wherewithal to punish those who dared to flirt with dissension and to reward those who accepted its terms of cooperation. Now, other parties and leaders are in a position to exercise veto over its return to the national *gaddi*.

The BJP victories in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have postponed the day of the NDA's collapse. None of the allies will want to jump off a stable ship. With the NDA holding firm, the Third Front cannot take off. The parties that could potentially constitute the 'Third Front' are still in no position to bypass the Congress to become the core of a successful coalition; this still-to-be-born Third Front would need the defections of substantial 'allies', past or present, like the Nationalist Congress Party, Jayalalithaa's AIADMK, or Mayawati's BSP, before it could be perceived as a workable proposition. The three BJP victories have not only stopped the NDA's much expected crumbling process and the consequent realignment of forces, the north Indian vote has also reduced the Congress' attractiveness as the kingpin of a potentially winning alternative coalition.

The BJP has managed, thanks to the Atal prime ministerial innings so far, a reputation as a party of governance; so far this was the Congress claim, a claim based on history as also on sheer experience of ministerial years it could boast of. All these years there was a nice fit between the Idea of India and the Congress credentials to implement and carry forward that idea. The longer the Congress stays out of power, the weaker will be its claim to be the only party that knows how to govern this vast country. Nothing symbolizes the weakening claim than the leadership claims and expe-

rience of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi.

The BJP has also demonstrated a capacity for staying together, despite all the reports and facts of ambition, intrigue and insurgency from the Advani camp. This is in sharp contrast to the Morarji Desai-Charan Singh divorce, as also to the V.P. Singh-Chandra Shekhar/Devi Lal separation, and the P.V. Narasimha Rao-Arjun Singh/N.D. Tiwari breakdown. True, the Advani prime ministerial ambition factor has produced divided government and divided authority, but the opposition has been unable to take advantage of this internal split. The BJP may become the first non-Congress political party to come to power and complete its five year term.

What has sustained the BJP/NDA coalition is the Vajpayee government's achievements since 1998. These achievements have reinforced the BJP's claim – a demonstrable claim – of being a party capable of dealing adequately, competently and even innovatively with the rest of the world, conducting our foreign relations with becoming responsibility and pursuing our national interests relentlessly. It can claim to have redefined the India-USA relationship; it has taken forward the process of rapprochement with China, without in any way diluting the traditional ties with Russia. Except for Pakistan, it has dealt with our South Asian neighbours sensitively, though there have been moments when New Delhi has acted clumsily and boorishly. But more importantly, the Vajpayee government has demonstrated a knack for converting economic strength and advantage into geostrategic opportunities.

Above all, the BJP/NDA has demonstrated a reasonable competence in performing the basic task of

a ruling party: the art of garnering political support for the Indian state. The task requires unending negotiations for consent, agreements that bring value-additions to the Indian state's legitimacy. Those who get a chance to preside over the Indian state have an obligation to ensure that discontent and dissension do not degenerate into secession, and those who feel alienated and entertain secessionist thoughts are given reasons and incentives to stay within.

The fundamental task of the Centre's political executive is to creatively use democratic representativeness and electoral legitimacy to make the Indian state an attractive proposition, an arrangement that is based on inclusion, partnership and equality. The BJP has, by and large, performed this task. It has made a fetish of having introduced creativity in the Indian federal structure. It is to the BJP's credit that it has carried forward the dialogue process with the insurgents in Nagaland, worked out an agreement with the Bodos and established a Bodo Territorial Council, and agreed to sit across the table from the All Party Hurriyat Conference in Kashmir. And within, it has remained sensitive to the representational demands. For example, it has continued to expand the Mandal list, without seen as playing the Mandal card.

Having continued the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh-Chidambaram market-centric economic reforms, the BJP has handled the political economy reasonably well. Corporate India has good reason to be satisfied with its performance; all those who during 1997/1998 took the risk of investing in a Atal Bihari Vajpayee prime ministerial bid, can be said to have more than recovered their money. The Vajpayee dividend has been good for corporate India. The middle classes

too have been given no reason to be unhappy with the BJP; for all the outrages and crudities of the Sangh Parivar and VHP, the Vajpayee regime has had a soothing effect on the ever-frail nerves of the middle classes. According to its economists and policy-makers, the consuming and spending middle classes are growing and expanding at breakneck speed. The BJP appears to have decided to elevate the middle classes as the dominant category of voters, not just in terms of influence or economic clout, but also in terms of political preponderance.

On the eve of the next general election then, the polity appears to be delicately poised but not uneasy with itself: the incumbent party has not given sufficient reason to substantial powerful groups, interests, individuals, or ideological conclaves to feel angry enough to want it out. Corporate India is enjoying its honeymoon with the Vajpayee regime; the middle classes are being serenaded; the OBCs, the dalits and the tribals are being politically courted and accommodated; only the minorities have a legitimate reason to be dissatisfied with the ruling party. By contrast, the BJP's rivals are unable to propose any platform that will make any of these pro-BJP groups and constituencies switch sides.

The chances then are that the next Lok Sabha elections would replicate the current 13th Lok Sabha and we shall find ourselves in the second half of the Atal decade. This decade has the potential of transforming the Indian state and its polity if Atal Bihari Vajpayee can succeed in bringing off three transformations.

First, reconciliation and peace with Pakistan. For most part of his prime ministerial innings, Vajpayee has helped deepen an anti-Pakistan mood

in the country. He and his party have instigated a redefinition of Indian nationalism as one negatively anchored in cultivated animosity towards Pakistan. Having demonstrated that the Indian state would not be run out of Kashmir and having acquired a new confidence in the appeal of democratic India to the people of Kashmir, especially since the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, he now appears to have decided to seek reconciliation with an intractable foe.

In the first week of November, he addressed the Combined Commanders Conference, the most formidable gathering of military officers in India. And he had this to tell his generals: 'I will also say a few words about our western neighbour, Pakistan. We have yet again announced some measures a few days ago to promote greater people-to-people interaction, cultural exchange and economic cooperation. Our constant effort is to encourage those elements in Pakistan who recognise the folly of permanent hostility towards India. By our recent measures, we have also silenced the whispering campaign that the requirements of forthcoming elections dictate a harsh Pakistan policy. The political leadership of this country is well aware that the constituency for peace with Pakistan is much larger than that which favours hostility.'

This was probably the first time that an Indian prime minister articulated the strength of the 'peace constituency', that too before an audience that has an organizational and ideological interest in hostility towards an 'enemy'. It may be that having won the 1999 election as a Kargil war hero, Vajpayee was tempted to showcase himself as peacemaker. Whatever the political compulsions, should Vajpayee succeed in redefining our relationship with Pakistan, it would

recast our polity also. And, needless to add, any reconciliation with Pakistan will temper the contours of alienation and conflict within Kashmir.

The second reconciliation the Vajpayee decade could see would be at home with the minorities. The middle classes which fuel the economy and have no time for distractions demanded by the likes of Praveen Togadia and Ashok Singhal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, would force the Vajpayee regime to offer the minorities a respectable place at the high table of Indian democracy and dream. Whatever be their stance at the hustings, even the most ideological of Vajpayee's ministers never tire of telling foreign audiences that not a single Indian Muslim had been found to be among the worldwide Al Qaeda network.

As prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee has, by and large, remained faithful to secular constitutional obligations. Gujarat was an exception. But later on he saw to it that the Modi regime did not act as if it was immune to the demands of rule of law. Even under pressure from Hindu fundamentalists to rig the system in their favour, especially in the Ayodhya matter, he has been careful not to provide them any comfort outside the realm of the Constitution. The Muslim community itself has watched his periodic bouts with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which of late has taken to condemning him as 'anti-Hindu'.

If Vajpayee were able to achieve any kind of breakthrough with Pakistan, he and his party would be able to reach out to the minorities. As it is, there is a realization that unending hostility towards Pakistan and an anti-Islamic bias in our fight against terror would only suck India into conditions of civil war; the Muslim community too has no reason to subscribe to the

jehadis' definition of a new global order. In any case, the inspired hostility that the Muslims are made to feel towards the BJP is a byproduct of political contestation between the secular and the communal camps. If the larger context of animosity towards Pakistan changes, then the sub-text of internal prejudices and preferences will change too.

The third transformation that the Atal decade could see is the possible metamorphosis of the BJP into a 'normal' party. This is the most difficult task that Vajpayee would be asked to perform. The BJP cannot become a normal party till it is weaned away from the RSS; for now, the idea is sheer blasphemy for any BJP functionary – from the most traditionalist like L.K. Advani to the most modernist like Arun Jaitley. But that weaning would become objectively desirable and possible as the BJP realizes that in the process of becoming a governing party it is also changing – against its wishes and against its grain. As it is the BJP has travelled a long way from being a bania party to a party that can rightly claim to have the OBCs, the tribals and dalits with it.

A party has reason to remain dogmatic and unchanging when it is confronted by an entrenched enemy, but the BJP's 'challenge' is weakening. Just as the 1984 'sweeping' victory made the Congress turn inward, looking for 'enemies' within, purging itself of what Rajiv Gandhi called the influence of power brokers, a victory in 2004 should help the BJP sort out its internal and external demons. Without a formidable challenge, the party can manicure its zeal, redefine its priorities and remix its profile. Now, with its oppositional agenda fulfilled, the BJP in the Atal decade will have to become a normal party.

2

The maturing voter?

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE year two thousand and three ended with elections to four state assemblies that are being presented as landmark elections in more ways than one could list. The fact that three out of the four states now have women chief ministers is, in itself, quite remarkable, though whether the fact that these campaigns were led by women actually had an independent impact on women voters is still disputed. This election also supposedly brought out the newly consolidated moderation of the BJP, now campaigning on issues of governance and performance rather than Hindutva. For many observers this suggested that the BJP is capable of outgrowing its core ideology and can free itself from the nefarious influence of the parivar organizations like the RSS and the VHP.

But most importantly the election seems to have generated a considerable commentary on the supposed maturing of the Indian voter. This new Indian voter cannot be taken for granted, is less susceptible to the emotive appeals of identity politics, is demanding performance and judging governments by their capacity to deliver, and is growing more sophisticated in its demands. In some ways

the moderation of the BJP and the maturity of the Indian voter are seen as two sides of the same coin: the BJP has recognized the Indian voter for what she is becoming and in turn has tried to position itself to exploit these new expectations. Like with the economy, specifically who wins or loses matters less; what is important is the feel good factor. We are showing signs of transcending the scourge of identity politics (the political analogue of the Hindu rate of growth). A new Indian voter is being born.

That these elections were, on the whole, a wholesome affair is not in doubt. What is a little more debatable is whether they in fact represent as significant a break with the past as we would like to think. Part of the aim of this essay is to question the implicit dichotomies on which this narrative of the maturing voter rests: governance versus identity politics, emotive versus rational voting, a gullible versus informed voter. All these dichotomies are grossly overstated, as if to imply that identity politics could not be a rational strategy, that governance issues are not conjoined to identity concerns, or that we are beginning to see the light of reason clearing the fog of emotion. So Mandal, Mandir,

Masjid have been replaced by Sadak, Bijli, Pani: the modern citizen has finally appeared.

It is important to question this narrative of the maturing voter for two reasons. What I do not wish to contest is the 'maturity' of the Indian voter, a presumptuous topic to discuss anyway. What I hope to cast some doubt upon is the claim that we are seeing some significant change in this respect. The first is simply academic: this is not a very plausible story about the history of Indian voting patterns, and possibly grossly underestimates how 'rational' and governance-oriented the Indian voter always was given the structure of choices they faced. The second is that this narrative might lead to a false prognostication about the future of identity politics, in particular the continued political salience of Hindutva.

What really drives the Indian voter? If we are honest we have to begin by admitting that we are not quite sure and the usual questions asked in the context of voting behaviour are empirically often hard to disentangle. Does the Indian voter vote prospectively or retrospectively? Do we vote to punish incumbents to choose the best possible alternative? The astonishing rate of incumbent turnover, as high as fifty per cent for state assemblies, has created a sense that, barring occasional exceptions, anti-incumbency has become close to an iron law of Indian politics.

On one view we want to express what we are dissatisfied with, we are punitive in a knee jerk manner, but are not clear what we want in its place. But the distinction between prospective and retrospective voting, voting that looks to the future as opposed to the past is a very murky one indeed, and it is not clear what would count as evidence in favour of one rather than

the other. Is anti-inc incumbency an emotive expression of anger against those in power, more a sign of our angst, or is it a rational, strategic response to the choices facing the electorate? It would be very difficult to characterize it as one or the other.

Second, take our buzzword: governance. Is it the case that we are increasingly more governance sensitive as voters than we used to be? How would we argue this case? What dimensions of governance do we take seriously? Why roads and electricity, not health and education? One strategy would be to look at the content of election campaigns like the one recently concluded. It could then be argued that the issues that dominated the election, be it clean air in Delhi, or power in Madhya Pradesh, are governance related issues. This emphasis is in stark contrast to Gujarati pride related issues that we witnessed in Gujarat just over a year ago, or caste identity politics that has been driving so many of our elections recently. But this construal of what happened in the current overlooks some salient features of past elections and ignores some of the undercurrents of this one.

First, we seem to have quickly forgotten the old cliché of Indian politics that the price of onions had a significant impact on elections. This was really a way of acknowledging that inflation, especially of food commodities, was always very important to Indian elections. It defies logic to think that inflation is not a central governance indicator. Whatever their other faults, governments in India were terrified of inflation and this is one of the reasons why we have consistently chosen inflation averse policies (compared to most developing countries) and no political party has been able to ignore macroeconomic stability without risking a political price. We are currently

witnessing impressive growth, low inflation and a reasonably optimistic economic scenario, so the demands of the voters are changing. But this hardly suggests that we were not governance oriented in the past.

Second, the opposition between identity issues and governance issues is much too sharply drawn in our political discourse. It is often argued that both Congress and post-Congress politics were in their own different ways identity based. In this narrative the Congress relied upon Dalit and Muslim vote blocs and nurtured vote bank politics (a euphemism for identity politics if ever there was one). During the eighties and nineties what changed was not so much vote bank politics, but the fact that these voting blocs, Dalits and OBCs in particular, were now giving their allegiance to their own political parties, based on demands of recognition and a politics of self-esteem. In this view, what we are now witnessing is a replacement of identity with governance issues.

This narrative has always struck me as being too simple minded about how Dalits or Muslims or other backward castes voted. There is very little evidence that these groups voted unthinkingly in blocs. Rather what the Congress relied on in the early days after independence was a tripartite appeal in the case of Dalits: the possibility of mild land reform, direct poverty alleviation strategies and the rhetoric of affirmative action in government. Even Indira Gandhi's central slogan during the seventies, 'Garibi Hatao', was premised on promising tangible benefits to sections of the population. From the vantage point of view of these sections, these were the crucial governance issues and they predominantly went along with the party that seemed to be in the best position to deliver these goods.

In our current enthusiasm for governance discourse, we implicitly smuggle in another opposition: governance discourse is a demand for universal goods compared to particularistic identity claims. But it can also be asked of governance goods: governance goods for whom? From the vantage point of many voters, access to state jobs and poverty alleviation schemes were governance goods – a measure along which they judged whether government had done something for them. These deserted the Congress in large part because it did not come good on these promises: reservations remained symbolic, the plight of the landless dire and poverty reduction a cruel joke. But it is difficult to argue that governance mattered less.

It is the case that the nineties saw the resurgence of two forms of identity politics: caste based political parties, especially in North India and Hindutva more generally. Caste politics seemed to be centred on the claims of particular identities; it placed greater emphasis on the politics of self esteem (Ambedkar statues as opposed to health and education), and seemed to demand – what from a middle class point of view is the ultimate non-governance approach – reservations. But in a sense even this caste politics was governance centred in its own way. It was premised upon the hypothesis that governance cannot be altered, at least in ways that matter, to large sections of the population, unless these sections gained access to state power and the entire structure of political representation was altered.

What many caste groups were doing was judging government by the quality of interactions they had with the state, and they came to the conclusion that their interests could not be protected unless they had significant

representation in the structures of the state. The demand for reservations was not a blind expression of identity, but a rational demand that emerged from particular social experiences. It is easy to slight Mayawati and company for, as one commentator put it, ‘making sure that their only achievement was that Ambedkar’s name will not be forgotten. It will be etched around every corner in the name of an institution, a statute or a colony.’ But even this aspiration stems from a concern with governance. Many deprived sections of society were judging governance by its ability to produce a public sphere that did not slight them, marginalize them or alienate them, and they went along with parties that seemed committed to such a sphere.

It is true that this politics had to speak the language of self-esteem of particular groups rather than the language of universal entitlement; it judged governance along some dimensions rather than others. But to describe that politics as unconcerned about governance is failing to give this politics its historical due. Voters were being rational, given their concrete social experiences, in the strategic choices they made; this was not a politics of blind emotion.

There is no doubt that caste categories were and will continue to remain salient to Indian politics. It is difficult to argue that the outcome in Rajasthan in the recent elections had little to do with caste and more to do with governance issues. The reasons for the continued salience of caste are complex and will require a separate discussion. But as I have been suggesting the opposition between governance and caste related issues is a little too quick.

Caste can be a rational consideration to vote upon if you conclude that there is not much difference in the governance capacities of the parties

you have to choose between, or that the individual abilities of your legislator will not make any difference to your lives. At least access to state power might make a difference to your life in a way in which general promises made by parties might or might not.

Voters have always made strategic choices on dimensions of governance that affect them and it is difficult to argue that this election represents a qualitative break on this score. Many would argue with some plausibility that even in this election it was striking that the delivery of two crucial social entitlements along which governance ought to be measured, health and education, were not issues at all, and it would be premature to conclude that we are seeing a fundamental change in demand patterns of the electorate.

The two things that did possibly change in this election are the following. First, if anything is disappearing from Indian politics it is populism rather than identity politics. Most voters understand that there is no such thing as a free lunch (at least not for very long) and there is more sense amongst all political parties that populism is not sustainable. Free electricity does not mean much when you don’t have electricity to distribute and voters would rather contribute and get an assured supply than fall for the promise of free and not get anything.

Part of the constraint on populism may also be a simple recognition of fiscal realities. Most states, thanks to a combination of current expenditure on salaries and pensions of employees and interest payment of debts are broke, and there just is not that much to spend. It does not therefore help to fuel high expectations; most voters and politicians now understand the limits of populism.

The second change relates to the role of the media. Hindi television media in particular now has a depth of coverage – small villages, towns and bylanes of India – to an extent that is unprecedented. So instead of going round and round on the same tired issues as the English media often does, Hindi television has the capacity for giving detailed coverage of individual constituencies and local issues. Instead of asking every MLA the same general questions, you could actually confront them with the realities of their own constituency: point a camera to a pothole or a non-existent road, show broken electricity wires or dry canals. Perhaps because there was no single dramatic event, the media finally found some time for governance.

What about Hindutva? Did the BJP not insistently occupy the space of governance rather than Hindu nationalism in these elections? In a certain sense there is something to this claim, but again less than meets the eye. The contrast between this and previous elections can be overstated. First, as more sober analysis of even the Gujarat elections would show, governance issues were important to those elections. Modi for instance, made a lot of the fact that he had brought water to large parts of Gujarat.

Second, Modi and all that he stands for, was not an insignificant factor in this election in parts of Madhya Pradesh; the RSS has made inroads in tribal belts based on its ideology. I suspect that we have underestimated the possible fallout from the Rajasthan government's banning of trishuls, if not the arrest of Togadia. That it has taken a quieter, less belligerent form is a sign of the growing sophistication of Hindutva politics, not evidence for the fact that the voters have given it up for governance.

In order to understand these points ask the question: under what circumstances does Hindutva manifest itself in a politically belligerent manner? It seems that there are at least two conditions required for this to happen. First, there has to be a framing context or a precipitating event that can fuel the politics of Hindu anxiety such as Shah Bano, Godhra, and terrorism. Second, the Sangh Parivar has to undertake a protracted mobilization: *rath yatra's, gaurav yatra's* that can capitalize on this politics of anxiety. In the recently concluded elections neither condition obtained. There was no framing context that fuelled a politics of anxiety, no immediate experience that could be tapped into. And the BJP was not in a position to undertake a protracted Hindutva mobilization for at least three reasons.

First, it was feeling confident that the NDA's record would do it some good and Hindutva had the potential at this juncture of simply diverting attention from what it felt to be its own achievements. Second, what issue would Hindutva mobilize upon? Arguably Ayodhya. But to do that at this stage would backfire. Depending upon the form of mobilization, it could still rock the alliance whose partners are possibly more risk averse closer to an election. Raising the issue would also invite the uncomfortable question of why the BJP has not done much on Ayodhya in the last five years. It is in the BJP's interest, at the moment, to throw cold water on the issue. So it has been prudently taking the line that the practical realities of Indian politics and the constraints of Indian institutions place limits on how fast it can proceed on Ayodhya. Now it will mobilize only when it either has nothing else going for it, or it is in a position to manage a decisive victory on this issue.

Finally on almost all other issues – the long term cultural transformation of the country, the reconfiguring of Indian education, cow slaughter ban in the states, anti-conversion legislation, marginalization of Muslim politics – it has steadily been gaining victory with the complicity of all other political parties. The simple fact is that on most of its issues it does not need to mobilize any more.

If the above analysis is plausible, then the BJP's turn to governance should not be seen as a departure from its core ideology. It is rather a politically shrewd attempt to configure the progress on its core ideology in accordance with the practical realities of Indian politics. The BJP itself will be more secure if it manages what many think would be an oxymoron: Hindutva plus governance. But this is by no means a supplanting of Hindutva by governance as many observers claim. Hindutva is here for the long haul.

It is easy to dismiss Hindutva as irrational and emotive politics, contrasted with the civilities of governance issues, that in the final analysis its agenda, if successful has the potential of destroying much that is valuable about the experiment that we call modern India. But I fear that our simple-minded oppositions between governance and Hindutva, reason and emotion, identity and material goods, caste and citizenship, fail to adequately capture the complex forces operating in Indian elections and may give us a false sense of the future.

The Indian voter remains what she always has been: a complex creature, thinking through her anxieties and needs, making strategic choices and sometimes making mistakes, trying to be rational in what are often irrational circumstances. To give her as bland a title as 'the governance voter' will be to miss the tumult of Indian politics.

Advantage Vajpayee

MAHESH RANGARAJAN

THE five state assembly elections of winter 2003 have put a spring in the step of the BJP. In the wake of the results, there was much speculation about an early snap poll, possibly in April. Whether this happens or not, the sea change in the political landscape since five years ago is remarkable. Then, the Congress ousted the BJP from power in two states and held onto Madhya Pradesh against all odds. It prompted the party leadership under Sonia Gandhi to work for the downfall of the second Vajpayee government. The rest is history: it was the Congress that suffered an erosion of strength and the NDA emerged for the first time with a clear majority.

India 2004 is then a very different place in the simplest sense. A non-Congress regime is about to complete a full five-year term in office. After decades of one party rule, uninterrupted for a full thirty years, India will have had a non-Congress PM who will, by September 2004, have been in

office for six and a half years. The unruly gaggle of two-dozen odd parties has held together with a few exceptions. More significant, however, are the shifts within the coalition and in the premier party at its core.

The real advantage of the BJP has been its ability to knit and hold together its regional and sub-regional allies. This was a task that was made immeasurably difficult in the phase from 1986-96 when the party put its ideologically charged agenda at the centre of its platform. It was only by stepping back, even if tactically, from critical symbolic issues that it was able to widen its catchment of allies. Such a denouement was never an easy one for a party linked indissolubly to its parent organisation, the RSS. But it was born of necessity. The litmus test came in the forging of post-poll ties with the Telugu Desam Party in 1998 and then with a successful pre-poll pact in 1999. Despite the fact that the two do not and have never shared

power, they have stood together to keep the Congress at bay, both in Hyderabad and New Delhi.

This critical ability to share the spoils of office with regional parties on a stable and enduring basis has helped hold the NDA together. This has been far more useful with other players like the Akali Dal and the DMK. As much as residual anti-Congressism deepened by joint struggles against the Emergency in 1975-77, this has helped the BJP especially at times when such regional parties have been voted out of office in their respective states.

What few had foreseen was the way in which such smaller parties would slowly be marginalized within the NDA by the BJP. From being the majority partner it has steadily moved towards a position of dominance. Nowhere was this as clearly illustrated as in the Gujarat carnage of 2002, when the sound and fury of the pluralist allies fell far short of a complete break. It has been equally clear in the way key portfolios like telecommunications have moved out of the orbit of smaller allies and firmly into the BJP's own sphere of influence.

The very regional parties that were once central to the creation of the United Front governments of H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral have shown few qualms about marching in step with the BJP. In Tamil Nadu, the state with the longest history of popular regional parties, both the key players have had pre-poll alliances and post-poll power sharing arrangements with Vajpayee's party. An alliance may be too much to play for, but few are now in doubt about a close entente, unlike the one vis-à-vis Congress, between Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP and the BJP-led government at the Centre.

These developments have been facilitated and underpinned by the

transformations within the BJP itself. Contrary to what many had forecast after the resounding victory in Gujarat in 2002, the party did not press ahead with a Hindutva-centred platform. Part of this may have arisen from the failure to strike a chord with voters in Himachal Pradesh. An incumbent government led by Prem Kumar Dhumal, only the third ever BJP ministry in any state to complete a full term, was swept out of office. The upshot was that Hindutva, though very much in evidence in specific ways and in key arenas in the assembly polls, never quite became the central poll plank of the party.

This remained so despite the fact that in the four Hindi belt assemblies, the party was not dependent on allies. Further, at least two of the chief ministerial aspirants, Vasundhara Raje Scindia and Uma Bharati, had both been part of the 87 strong batch of Lok Sabha MPs who won in 1989 at a time when the Ram temple issue first figured prominently in a general election campaign. Such flexibility is not new but is still significant, for it points to a willingness to tack with the wind in a manner that neither its critics nor its well-wishers usually associate with the party.

Perhaps the party also studied its past record carefully, for only in Gujarat in 2002 and in Uttar Pradesh in 1991, did Hindutva become the mascot for electoral success in a state election. The BJP first won state level polls only in 1990, and in MP, for instance, the promise of land *pattas* to the peasantry was a major vote-winner. Similarly, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat in Rajasthan won re-election in 1993 after a truncated term in office (1990-92), partly on the appeal of a better deal for farmers on the pricing of chemical fertiliser.

The 2003 results have gone further than any in the past in vindicating

the Vajpayee approach of foregrounding issues of governance over those overtly associated with the core ideology of the party. To be sure, there was never any hesitation about following the advice of the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani who asked party workers to have the 'NDA agenda in one hand and the party flag in the other.' More striking was the way that even Narendra Modi, who addressed over 40 election meetings in the three large states, subtly shifted his emphasis from Hindu pride to the lack of development.

Any simplistic contrast of a soft and hard line Hindutva would be misplaced. The RSS remained critical to the campaign process in Madhya Pradesh with the *sarsanghchalak*, K.S. Sudarshan, himself calling on all who believed in national unity to defeat the 'divisive' dalit agenda of Chief Minister Digvijay Singh. In Rajasthan, the Sangh was less in evidence, but most if not all of its 120 MLAs were subjected to a session on ideological indoctrination. Chhattisgarh witnessed a more brazen act: repeated and public defence of former Union Minister Dilip Singh Judeo's acceptance of cash 'donations' in the name of re-conversion. So, Hindutva is very much on the agenda, but in a subtle and long-term sense. In all three states, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams played a role in helping the party win as many as 77 of the 99 seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes.

But the gains in terms of control of the key sectors of education, culture and the police by the BJP should not blind anyone to the wider message in the poll campaign. The issue was governance and the ability of the party to lead India into the new century. Here the Congress fell woefully short: it came across as a force mired in the past. Equally important was the way

Vajpayee outlined his own vision for India's future. He spoke of a country linked by high-speed highways, with mobile phones and giant river linking projects. In an important way, he tipped the scales in his party's favour by playing on the work done under his own leadership at the Centre.

It is a fact that too much must not be read into the verdict. The BJP still governs only 7 states out of 28. It failed to return to power in its old citadel of Delhi and suffered a crushing defeat. In the nine assemblies in the Hindi belt, there is a historic pattern of voting out the ruling party since 1972. The sole exception was the assembly elections of 1985. Other than that, Digvijay Singh in 1998 and Sheila Dikshit in 2003 are unusual in being able to retain office after a full term.

The details of electoral outcome can be tedious but some key facts still stand out. In MP, it was the third force parties representing the interests of the dalits, OBCs and *adivasis*, that ate into the Congress vote. The BSP, SP and Gondwana Ganatantra Parishad between them took around 11% of the popular vote. Similarly in Chhattisgarh, the Nationalist Congress Party did more than poll 7% of the vote and deny Congress victory in a dozen seats. It also highlighted the inability of the once powerful party to hold together, and exposed cracks in its support base in a manner that helped its arch rival, the BJP.

But the historic pattern of 'voting the rascals out' and the rise of smaller parties that ate away the Congress vote share are only a small part of the evolving picture. The fact is that under Vajpayee the BJP has built on its earlier, more hesitant attempts to woo newly assertive blocs of voters. This was already evident in the late 1980s in the willingness to project Kalyan Singh, a Lodh, as potential leader in

Uttar Pradesh. It was further cemented in the three post poll pacts with the Bahujan Samaj Party in a bid to convince dalits of the reform-minded credentials of the BJP.

But the line up of chief ministers in the seven states it now controls shows how far the party has managed to incorporate a sense of social pluralism into its strategies. Two are women, two are OBCs (Modi and Bharati), two are adivasis (Arjun Munda in Jharkhand and Gegong Apang in Arunachal Pradesh). Two and only two are *savarna* Hindus: Raman Singh, a Rajput in Chhattisgarh and Manohar Parrikar, a Bhandari in Goa. The omissions are striking: none at the head of government is a *bania*. Brahmins may be prominent in the Sangh itself but are less so in the party branches in the states.

Time alone will tell whether the BJP's fortunes owe to the vagaries of the electoral cycle or are due to its superior tactics and strategy. But there is no denying that it has come to occupy a central place in the political landscape. Two critical advantages accrue to it from such a network.

Its network of allies has helped offset declines in key regions of strength such as UP which were central to its rise into the premier opposition party in 1991 and then as single largest party in the next two Lok Sabha polls. The decline and marginalisation in UP, first in the Lok Sabha and then in the state assembly, has been offset by alliances with regional parties in states where the party had little hope of doing well on its own. It is here that Vajpayee has been a lynchpin of success.

In 1996, Murasoli Maran referred to him as 'the right man in the wrong party.' By downplaying the temple agenda, Article 370 and the Uniform Civil Code, Vajpayee man-

aged to give such regional parties the opening they were looking for. He was no doubt helped by the virtual absence of the party in large parts of southern and eastern India. But to have kept the allies together, or better still to have been able to replace one regional party with another, is no mean feat. This has been true of Om Prakash Chautala who displaced Bansi Lal in Haryana and Karunanidhi who filled in the slot vacated the J. Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu.

The second factor working in favour of the BJP is a wider acceptance of coalitions as a fact of life. While such alliances have been a prominent feature of politics in states like West Bengal and Kerala, and more recently of Maharashtra, they have been the exception rather than the norm at the Centre. The 1977 experiment was short-lived and an excellent advertisement for the stability of one party rule. But since 1989, no party has won a majority. Running a minority government proved to be easier for P.V. Narasimha Rao who managed to keep his ministry intact from 1991-93 but not for Vajpayee whose first two governments lasted thirteen days and thirteen months respectively. But the spell in office since 1999 makes mockery of the core Congress argument that it alone can usher in stability.

The latter is crucial for it drives home the isolation of the Congress, now a rare national party that has no experience of coalitions. Even the CPI (M), which kept out of coalitions in 1977, 1989 and then in 1996, has at least been part of the political machinery that keeps them in place. The main role of the Congress has been that of an unsteady and unreliable partner that topples such governments at will. The BSP has had no such experience either but interestingly its only experience of governance in UP has, on all

four occasions, been in coalitions or in ministries which depend on the support of a multiplicity of parties. The breakaway group, the Nationalist Congress Party of Sharad Pawar, not only challenged Sonia Gandhi's authority and right to lead the party but also implicitly favours a coalition of non-BJP parties that leaves the issue of leadership open to negotiation.

At Shimla in 2003, the Congress opened the door to alliances, but it was firmly shut by its own functionaries who insisted their president alone could lead such a coalition government. After the rout in the assembly polls in December, she called for a secular alliance but the basis in programmatic terms is unclear and the issue of leadership still undecided. The Congress aspires to power but is unable to come to grips with the reality of pre-poll alliances. By coming to terms with these tectonic shifts and holding his government in place, Vajpayee has made this a very difficult pitch for any Congress leader to bat on.

The issue goes well beyond the personality or the background of Sonia Gandhi for it strikes at the heart of a core assumption the Congress clung to in the freedom struggle: its right to represent and speak for all Indians. In the India of the 21st century, no one party can aspire to such a role. Yet, the BJP has not so much displaced the Congress as the dominant political force in the system as has adapted to the changes that permit a large party to wield power only if it falls in line with the inevitability of coalitions.

What then of the future? If India's recent political past is a guide, Vajpayee has opened up a chance that his party will play an increasingly central role in remaking the polity. Will the cultural and ideological markers of the system be transformed in major and

irreversible ways in line with its core ideology? The fact is that though the process was set in motion by the previous Congress regimes, especially in the late Indira and Rajiv periods (1980-89), there is a major difference for the BJP is subject to two kinds of pulls and pressures the former ruling party did not have to contend with. One is the restraint imposed by its allies. Though currently on a roll, a smaller BJP or a more cohesive set of allies might well change things to its disadvantage.

The second is the continuing importance of the larger body of the Sangh's affiliates. They will continue to grow and gain from government largesse. This synergy of private (civil society) and government (public) resources can enable them to gain a certain role that will not diminish even if the party is voted out of office. This is most clearly so with the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams and also with the Sewa Bharati school system. But complimenting such efforts will be shifts in policy as with the history curricula.

This leads us to the question of questions. Will the democratic system tame the BJP as it has over time the regionally rooted ideological formations? After all, the Dravidian movement today is a far cry from its early platform of secessionist and militant non-Brahman politics. Similarly, the CPI(M) of the 21st century has much that distinguishes it from the United Front days of the late 1960s. Examples can be multiplied. But there is a major contrast between such parties and the BJP.

One is simply the contrast in terms of scale. The latter exists both in the states or at least several of them and as a key player in national politics. This will enable it to draw on its strengths in one arena to reshape the

other. This can be seen in a negative sense as with the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 or in a positive sense as in the poll campaign of 2003. The ability of the BJP to put its imprimatur on the polity, its idiom and grammar of politics exceeds that of other ideologically coherent political formations.

Further, the Vajpayee period has shown that the party *can* grow at the state level even while holding power at the Centre. In fact, there is a new generation of leaders who wield power in most of the seven states. In contrast to several key ministers and office bearers in New Delhi who are in the glare of media attention but are members of the indirectly elected Rajya Sabha, these chief ministers have a popular mandate. Should any of them succeed in meeting popular aspirations and retaining power, they will emerge as key players in the party of the future. It may not be out of place to mention that all of them have either come through the RSS or have its seal of approval.

Third, the acid test of whether or not the party has evolved beyond its moorings will only come when it has been in power in a state for a long period of time on its own strength. This does not seem feasible in the near future at the Union level. But Gujarat in 2002 was a warning and it is the sole state where the party has won three elections in a row. Was it an 'aberration' as L.K. Advani insists or a structural feature of the Hindutva brand of politics? The deputy prime minister's assertion will convince few outside his own party but the fact is much of the country is still willing to give him and his party the benefit of doubt. Whether the victims in Gujarat get justice and the perpetrators of violence are punished will be the real test. As with the Congress in 1984, it will be

its record that will speak, not its leader's claims.

Fourth, and this is crucial, no ideologically aligned party has hinged so much on the appeal of one individual as the BJP on Vajpayee. Much like Indira Gandhi in her last phase, he has become the talisman of success for his party. His ability to speak in many voices at the same time, his sheer experience and acceptability across the board, makes him a difficult leader to equal. In fact, his personal acceptability has provided a vital umbrella for the ideologically charged actions of his associates and followers. The party will be more vulnerable once he moves on. Whether the anti-BJP parties will utilise such an opportunity will be the key question.

In summary, Vajpayee has put the BJP where it is today. It is less a question of playing from strength than one of adapting a strategy to fit the situation. The Congress has failed to play the role of an effective opposition by allowing the ruling alliance to set the terms of the debate. The Third Front, though potentially strong on paper, is a non-starter in real terms. The regional parties have a place in the NDA universe and though less equal than others, they are for now content to play along. The main barriers in the way of the Sangh in its ideological drive are the institutions that have been built over the last few decades: the courts, the press and public opinion.

India lived for decades with a strong Congress government and a weak opposition. It appears that Vajpayee stands to gain from that legacy. The opposition of today is more divided and rudderless than the anti-Congress groups of yesteryear. The tide will, however, not run this way forever. People's aspirations have crossed the limits they were once contained in. If his party cannot meet them, there will be challengers waiting in the wings.

Whatever happened to Hindutva?

SWAPAN DASGUPTA

EVERY election produces its share of politicians angry with opinion polls. Following his party's ignominious defeat in Delhi, the BJP's Madan Lal Khurana rued the fact that he had to fight two battles simultaneously—one against the Congress and the other against a media that was being led by the opinion polls. In Rajasthan, where the BJP coasted to a famous victory, its leader Vasundhara Raje had a similar complaint. So intense is the anger at flawed opinion polls and wildly misleading media assessments that one BJP Cabinet minister has actually suggested a public audit of the media.

Infallibility being at the heart of its public image, the fourth estate is unlikely to oblige. Having misread the overall trend in the assembly elections of December 2003, the editorial classes have expediently shifted tack. Since both the Congress and the BJP contested the elections on the development governance theme, there is now a clamour to discover the 'respectable' face of saffron. It is being suggested that the triumph of the so-called Vajpayee line will witness the eclipse of the party's Hindutva orientation. Like the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' which has been reduced to a meaningless shibboleth for Marxist parties, Hindutva, it is argued, may soon assume a purely decorative role in the BJP.

It is not merely the absence of any overt Hindutva issues in the 2003 assembly elections—despite the Congress bid to make it an issue in Madhya Pradesh—that prompts interest in the BJP's strategic shift. If Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's assertion that what took place in Gujarat in 2002 was

an ‘aberration’ is accepted, there are reasons to believe that the BJP has been consciously diluting its Hindutva plank since the election of 1996.

Unlike the Lok Sabha election of 1989 and 1991 and the five assembly elections of 1993 when the Ram temple issue was the primary focus, the BJP has been increasingly fighting elections on traditional issues. In 1998 and 1999, Hindutva was largely absent from its campaign and the secular-communal debate was raised only by the secular camp. Post-1999, Hindu activist bodies like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) have accused the BJP of sacrificing Hindutva at the altar of political power. Cries of ‘betrayal’ have been repeatedly heard from the lips of both Ashok Singhal and Vishnu Hari Dalmia, stalwarts of the VHP. At times, the RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan has come close to endorsing the charges of treachery.

Has experience in government and the taste of political power induced a process of secularisation in the BJP? Or is this shift purely expedient and entirely a function of the coalition game that the party has developed into a fine art? Before examining the pulls and pressures within the party and the entire Sangh parivar, it may be instructive to look at the way Hindutva has figured in the party’s internal debates.

The BJP was established in 1980 as a direct consequence of the dual-membership controversy within the Janata Party. Since the stalwarts of the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) were not prepared to sever their ties with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), they chose to walk out of a dejected, divided and defeated Janata Party and establish the BJP. Unlike the BJS which was set up by Shyamaprasad Mookerjee as a Hindu nationalist alternative to the Congress and which the RSS encouraged its

members to join, the BJP’s RSS pedigree was more direct.

Paradoxically, the BJP chose to not showcase this umbilical cord that tied it to the RSS. In its early days, particularly till 1985, the BJP projected itself as a more wholesome version of the Janata Party that was established by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1977. Despite the misgivings of people like Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia, the original hardliner, the BJP embraced woolly notions like Gandhian socialism and broadly steered away of the secular-communal conflict. It attempted to forge a national alliance with Charan Singh’s Lok Dal and participated in N.T. Rama Rao’s movement against the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. Of course it was castigated by the Left and the socialists for its RSS links, but these were secondary to the larger project of forging a viable anti-Congress front.

The decimation of the BJP in the 1984 election proved a turning point. As the party confronted the grim reality of just two seats in the Lok Sabha (and one of them was courtesy the Telugu Desam), it realised that the Congress had successfully played the Hindu nationalist card in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi’s assassination. (In an open letter, Nanaji Deshmukh more or less suggested that the RSS cadres should vote for the Congress.) The post-election issue of *Organiser* had an evocative illustration of the Congress symbol with the BJP lotus prominently etched on the palm.

The conclusion the BJP drew from the 1984 election was simple and direct – never again would it permit the Congress to upstage it on its Hindu credentials.

It lived up to its promise. In 1985, Rajiv Gandhi succumbed to orthodox Muslim opinion, reversed the Shah Bano judgment of the Supreme

Court and enacted the Muslim women’s bill. With Advani at the helm, the BJP now had no inhibitions about flaunting its Hindu identity aggressively. From being a bit part of an amorphous anti-Congress cluster, the BJP assumed a distinct identity and called itself the ‘party with a difference’. Committed to the role of ideas in shaping the political agenda, Advani made terms like pseudo-secularism, minorityism and Hindutva part of the political lexicon. By the time, a pre-existing Ram Janmabhoomi movement was added to the party’s agitational focus in 1989, the BJP was on the way to redefining the national agenda.

The introduction of Hindutva into the party’s political vocabulary has an interesting story. Till 1987, Hindutva as a term did not feature in the party’s resolutions, manifestos and literature. Stalwarts like Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Balraj Madhok and Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke about Bharatiyata and Indianisation but not Hindutva. Since Hindutva had been popularised in Indian politics by Veer Savarkar in 1923, it almost seemed that the BJS/BJP was consciously distancing itself from the old Hindu Mahasabha tradition. Therefore, with the growing irrelevance of the Hindu Mahasabha after Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination in 1948, Hindutva fell into disuse. It only held sway among a small clutch of Hindu nationalist intellectuals who found the RSS and BJP insufficiently committed to Hindu resurgence.

It was Bal Thackeray who was instrumental in reviving the usage of Hindutva. In the aftermath of the Ville Parle by-election of 1986, when the Shiv Sena candidate won on an aggressive Hindutva platform, the BJP woke up to the potential of the concept. By 1987, Hindutva entered the BJP mainstream and became the

plank on which Advani based his rejuvenation of the party.

The centrality of Hindutva in today's BJP needs to be emphasised. The present leadership of the BJP has three strands. First, there are those who came into the party through a long association with the RSS in the *shakhas*. Second are those who entered the fold via their association with the JP movement and the struggle against the Emergency. Today they dominate the entire second rung of the party. Finally, an important section comprises those who came on board inspired by the Ayodhya movement. Interestingly, only a minority of them are from traditional Sangh backgrounds.

It is important to note that those who climbed on board after 1996, lured by the prospects of being in the ruling party, do not make up too sizeable a group within the BJP. Prime Minister Vajpayee may be setting the agenda and even calling the shots, but he does not head a separate faction or an ideological tendency. The primary commitment of those who make up the heart and soul of the BJP is to a blend of anti-Congressism and Hindutva.

This may prompt the instant conclusion that the present emphasis on governance and development is disingenuous and that behind the 'bread and butter' questions lurks a hidden BJP agenda for the transformation of India into a Hindu state. However, an examination of the ideological debates since 1996 suggest otherwise.

In 1991, the BJP was regarded as a political pariah, a situation that Advani was to describe as one of 'majestic isolation'. Apart from the Shiv Sena, no other party was inclined to associate with it. For the party this was a major electoral challenge. Tra-

ditionally, Indian electoral logic had proceeded on the assumption that the Congress was a stable pole in the polity. The ability to confront the Congress, it was felt, lay in the skill of a party or formation to consolidate the anti-Congress vote. The higher the Index of Opposition Unity (IOU), the argument went, the greater the possibilities of a Congress defeat.

The 1991 election punctured this theory. Mounting a shrill and energetic campaign, the BJP pierced the IOU barrier by reinforcing its traditional support with votes from both the Janata Dal and the Congress. It won 120 seats on its own steam. Had it not been for the dislocation of the campaign following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination and the postponement of elections by three weeks, the BJP tally may well have touched 150.

Redefining the electoral calculus and even emerging as the single largest party was a worthwhile objective but securing power needed another great leap forward. In early 1996 (before the Jain hawala case entered the public domain), Advani made a unilateral announcement that Vajpayee was to be the BJP's prime ministerial candidate. The decision was grounded in the belief that the BJP had reached saturation level as far as the political Hindu vote was concerned. To advance further, it needed an incremental vote.

Advani believed that his image of a hardliner – a consequence of the controversial rath yatra of 1990 and the Ayodhya demolition in 1992 – prevented a further accretion of the BJP's votes. Consequently, it was necessary to project a more benign face that could, at the same time, enable the party to enter into alliances with regional parties.

The strategy did not work in May 1996 when the Vajpayee govern-

ment fell after 13 days but the approach endured and started yielding returns as the United Front began disintegrating. In 1998, the BJP successfully crafted local alliances that enabled it to run a government for 13 months and win re-election in 1999.

In early 1998, at the first post-election meeting of the BJP National Executive in Delhi, Advani spelt out the broad parameters of the new thinking. Using the evocative expression 'New BJP', Advani drew on his experiences during the 1997 Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra to argue that *su-raj* or good governance should be the BJP ideal. He said that in the realm of governance, ideology played a very nominal role. It was a question of intelligent policy choices, dedicated commitment and superior managerial skills.

Initially, Advani's invocation of *su-raj* was greeted with healthy scepticism within the party. The debate those days centred on the government's ability to further the cause of Hindutva. Good governance remained a distant ideal, not least because untrained BJP ministers were still coming to grips with the basics of running a government. More than five years and some success stories later, good governance is rapidly becoming the BJP *mantra* and a part of the new look Hindu nationalism. After the success in the 2003 assembly elections, governance is going to be the central plank of the re-election campaign of 2004.

The role of Hindutva in the BJP's list of priorities has been the subject of many passionate internal debates and the cause of friction between the party and the VHP and even the RSS. Building good roads and creating the right economic environment for rapid growth are acknowledged to be important. But, ask the sceptics, how does this distinguish the BJP from the

Congress? The Congress, they suggest, could well have pursued the same policies?

That may well be true. However, in its quest to occupy the middle ground and emerge as the Great Indian Consensus, the BJP has not jettisoned Hindutva. Any leader, big or small, will gladly answer that Hindutva is part of the BJP's ideological personality – what Advani once called the 'ideological mascot' – and that its relevance depends on the context. It was relevant in Gujarat 2002 when the party rallied around Narendra Modi and prevented his removal, and it may well become relevant in future.

This is not to suggest that we will in future see another repeat of the 1991 campaign centred on Ram bhakts. There is a realisation in the BJP that the ritualised invocation of Ayodhya is carrying diminishing electoral returns. In addition, the VHP with its aggressive trishul-wielding style has a serious image problem. It is being increasingly perceived as the flip side of Islamic fundamentalism and something that should be firmly relegated to the margins. Yet, the average RSS cadre is driven by Hindutva and they are the people who serve as uncomplaining foot-soldiers at election time.

Striking a balance between good governance and Hindutva, therefore, remains a political challenge for the BJP during the 2004 election, particularly since there are fears that the RSS could easily encourage the formation of a separate Hindu party, as happened in Jammu in 2003. Nevertheless, it is likely to deal with the issue in a quiet, unobtrusive way that permits it to focus on its primary theme of good governance and keep its coalition intact. The following steps may well be taken to ensure that a united Sangh parivar forms the backbone of the 2004 campaign.

* It is recognised that it is futile to raise the Ayodhya issue in the same way as 1991. Apart from a certain weariness there is the problem of unfulfilled expectations. The BJP is, instead, likely to focus on the question of an acceptable solution to the problem, one that permits temple construction to begin, albeit symbolically. Serious efforts are on to secure Muslim acceptance of a package that permits a temple in Ayodhya coupled with a simultaneous assurance that the disputes in Kashi and Mathura will be frozen.

* Efforts will be made to inform the RSS leadership that the presence of a sympathetic government is invaluable for the progress of projects centred on education, adivasi welfare and prevention of conversions. The cooption of RSS sympathisers and members into official positions will continue.

* The issue of cow slaughter will be raised at the state level and become a concern during state elections. This is what happened in Madhya Pradesh, where Uma Bharati, expeditiously blended an assurance to ban cow slaughter with promise of better roads and assured power.

* Hindutva, it will be suggested, involves the redefinition of the Indian ethos and unlearning the Nehruvian vision. This can happen through education and intellectual interventions rather than official diktat.

* The problem of J&K will remain a sore point, particularly since the government is committed to greater autonomy for the state. Dissatisfaction on this can perhaps be overcome by instilling a greater awareness of the dangers posed by jihadi terrorism. In addition, the government may well commit itself to repealing the Illegal Migrants Detection Tribunal Act in Assam.

The BJP has not forsaken Hindutva. It has merely shifted its strategic role, a shift that has been entirely prompted by the context of the polls.

The paradoxes of Tehelka

VIR SANGHVI

TWO years ago, writing in the year-end issue of *Seminar*, I discussed the influence of the Tehelka scandal on the Indian media. My conclusions then were that while few investigative stories could have had the impact of Tehelka's Operation West End, it did not follow that the rest of the media would also adopt Tehelka's methods.

In fact, I said, many – if not most – journalists were uneasy about Tehelka's methods and uncomfortable with the very concept of sting operations. It may well be accurate to say that the problem of corruption has now reached such endemic levels that only by using the techniques of entrapment can investigators catch the guilty, but journalists had two basic problems with this approach.

First, there is the classic ethical problem that haunts all sting operations: can you hold somebody responsible for a crime that he would not have committed if you hadn't encouraged him? The essence of all entrapment is that you promise a man a reward for breaking the law and then, apprehend him when he takes the bait.

Journalists were undecided about the ethics of such operations, I suggested. We all accept that some level of entrapment is a part of all law enforcement. For instance, the police always send a dummy customer to a brothel and then arrest the prostitutes only when money has changed hands. The prostitutes could claim, in their

defence, that no crime had taken place or even, that it wouldn't ever have taken place but for the blandishments of the police. On the other hand, the police could retort that the brothel was open for business anyway and only by dispatching a dummy customer could they establish that sexual favours could be purchased.

But while different police forces have different standards for entrapment operations – in India, they are relatively rare, while in the US, the FBI likes to use them – most journalists have always reckoned that it is not the business of journalism to encourage people to take bribes or to break the law, even if all this is sought to be justified as a part of a lofty moral objective. The line that Indian editors have always taken is: once you allow your journalists to encourage people to break the law, you leave your paper open to all kinds of undesirable consequences.

Journalists also have a second objection to sting operations. Most of us are simply not cut out for them. By far the most astonishing thing about Operation West End, at least from my perspective, was the ease with which Tehelka's journalists wore wigs, pasted on false moustaches and affected strange accents. To be able to do all this requires skills that most of us simply do not possess.

To be sure, there are exceptions. In the UK, *The News of the World*

(a sensationalist newspaper often referred to as The Screws of the World) has a Pakistani investigative reporter whose speciality requires him to dress up as an Arab and fool important Brits into believing that he will give them lots of money if they are indiscreet or unethical. Once notable victim of such a sting operations has been Sophie Wessex, the wife of Prince Edward.

But no senior British newspaper would go as far as The News of The World. Most journalists take the line that acting and all that it implies – lying, dressing-up, making-up stories, fabricating identities – involve non-journalistic activities and therefore will have nothing to do with stings.

So that's the first of the Tehelka paradoxes. Everybody accepts that it was the most influential investigative story of our times and yet, nobody will touch its methods.

The second paradox is more obvious and has often been commented on. When the scandal broke, Tarun Tejpal was a hero and Bangaru Laxman, George Fernandes and Jaya Jaitly were in disgrace. At the time, the NDA government seemed fatally wounded while Tehelka seemed set to become a commercial goldmine: the biggest name on the internet, the medium of the future.

In fact, the opposite has happened. Tejpal may still be a hero (judging by the manner in which ordinary, middle class citizens react to him) but he is a hero who is deeply in debt. Of his targets, George Fernandes is back as Defence Minister and acts as though Tehelka never happened. Bangaru Laxman has yet to get back his party post but seems rehabilitated in all other respects. He appears regularly on TV as a legitimate political spokesman to remind us that he believes he was set-up. (Well, of course he was, that's the point of a sting.)

Most bizarre of all is the case of Jaya Jaitly who, despite being a former President of the Samata Party, came within a hair's breadth of being nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the President in the category normally reserved for distinguished private citizens (artists, musicians, scientists) who would not normally stand for Parliament. Far from feeling disgraced, she acts as though she was the victim of a dirty trick.

The NDA government was not fatally wounded even though most of us wrote it off in the immediate aftermath of Tehelka. It goes from strength to strength and the smart money is on A.B. Vajpayee winning another term.

On the other hand, Tehelka itself has closed down. After the government targeted two of its investors and destroyed their lives, nobody with money would touch Tehelka. Its offices were raided and its journalists arrested. The Commission set up to investigate the revelations that emerged from Operation West End was also charged with investigating Tehelka's antecedents (an act that is unprecedented in the history of investigative journalism anywhere in the world). Such were the demands of the Commission that Tehelka spent more time on finding files and writing legal responses than it did on journalism.

For a while, Tejpal kept it going by borrowing money from friends. Eventually, he called his staff and said that he simply couldn't borrow any more. The web-site closed down. So, that's the second paradox. Everybody in politics (though not the service officers who have been court-martialled) indicted by Tehelka has flourished, but Tehelka and its backers have been finished.

There's a third paradox. While journalists have remained unwilling to touch Tehelka's methods, there's

one class that has adopted these methods with alacrity: politicians.

In November, *The Indian Express* said that it had been given a video-disc containing footage of Dilip Singh Judeo, a central minister, accepting cash. The Express printed stills from that footage but it was the TV channels, which could show the video, that really finished Judeo off. Though he tried, at first, to suggest that the footage was faked, Judeo later changed his story to claim that the money had been given for a good cause and that anyway, even Mahatma Gandhi took money for politics. He was asked to resign from the Central government, regardless.

The Express would not reveal how it acquired the footage – nor was it under any moral obligation to do so – but there was also a disappointing lack of detail surrounding the expose. Who was paying Judeo off? What was the quid pro quo? None of this was made clear.

It was suggested that the money was in return for mining rights. Pramod Mahajan later disputed this version and said that Judeo had been told that the money was a donation towards his crusade to convert tribals to Hinduism.

When nobody came forward to confirm either version, it seemed clear that the whole thing had been a sting. A room had been booked at Delhi's Taj Mahal Hotel under an assumed name, video equipment installed in this room and Judeo set up. The minister's own unwillingness to name the people who had given him the money tended to strengthen the suspicion that he had been the victim of a sting.

But who had planned the sting? The BJP claimed that it was Judeo's opponent in state politics, the then Congress Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Ajit Jogi. Preliminary investiga-

tions by the CBI tend to support this hypothesis and certainly, among politicians in Chhattisgarh, it is regarded as certain that Jogi and his son were behind the video-disc.

But Jogi was soon to be the victim of another sting – this one directed against him.

After it was clear that the Congress had lost the assembly election in Chhattisgarh, Jogi tried to split the BJP. He approached BJP MLAs who appeared to agree to his blandishments.

In actual fact, they reported the matter to their party leadership. According to Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, he approved a sting operation and asked Law Minister Arun Jaitley to take it forward.

The Chhattisgarh MLAs asked Jogi for money and then secretly tape-recorded the negotiations. Eventually, Jogi and his son drove up with Rs 45 lakh in cash. The MLAs took the money but rushed back to Jaitley.

The Law Minister then held a press conference at which he played the tapes and displayed the money handed over by Jogi. The same night, Sonia Gandhi suspended Jogi from primary membership of the Congress party.

Both the Judeo operation and the Jogi episode were clearly sting operations. While the Judeo video-disc appears to have been produced by politicians, there is certainly no doubt that the Jogi tapes were recorded with the connivance of the BJP leadership.

In both cases politicians conducted sting operations that involved lying, acting, pretending and secret recorders – all things that journalists are still reluctant to do in the aftermath of Tehelka.

That is the third Tehelka paradox – a method available to journalists to trap politicians has been rejected by

journalists but eagerly adopted by politicians to trap each other.

Which brings us to the fourth paradox: the BJP's moral about-turn on the issue of sting operations.

In its more reasoned responses to Operation West End (as distinct from the hysterical responses when the whole thing was dismissed as an ISI operation), the BJP-NDA establishment made several points. These included the following.

- 1) All sting operations involve making people commit crimes that they would not otherwise have committed and are therefore immoral. When the Judeo video was released, the BJP dismissed it as 'a Tehelka-tape sting operation', using Tehelka as a term of abuse.
- 2) There are serious privacy issues in taping people without their knowledge.
- 3) All tapes can be doctored so there should be no rush to judgment till the tapes have been authenticated.
- 4) In any sting operation, the motives of those who conduct the operation are as important as (or even more important) than the results of the sting. Thus the Commission investigating Operation West End was told to devote equal attention to Tehelka's motives and the sources of its funding. In the Judeo case, the video-disc was held to be meaningless because it was the work of Jogi and son who, clearly, had an axe to grind.

All four positions now stand invalidated. Either that or the BJP is guilty of immorality in the Jogi case.

According to the BJP, all stings are immoral. And yet, no less a person than L.K. Advani okayed the Jogi sting. All of the BJPs rhetoric about hidden cameras and secret tape recorders being violations of privacy has now been overturned by the tapes made without Jogi's knowledge.

Even the caution about doctored tapes has been abandoned. L.K. Advani was quick to dismiss the Jogi episode as 'the most shameful episode in the history of our democracy' (and all this time we thought that the destruction of the Babri Masjid deserved that distinction!) The CBI quickly registered a case against Jogi (there is still no FIR against Bangaru Laxman, forgot about Judeo).

And finally, all the self-righteous guff about motives being the key has now been forgotten. The old argument that it didn't matter what the Tehelka tapes told us about Bangaru or Jaya Jaitley because Tehelka was functioning as an agent of the Hindujas/Subhash Chandra/stock market operators/arms dealers (strike out as applicable) has been dumped. So has the claim that the Judeo video lacked credibility because it had been made by Jogi who had an axe to grind.

In this case, everybody in the BJP who was involved in the Jogi tapes had, almost by definition, an axe to grind: they were out to trap a political opponent.

Using the BJP's own standards, this should make the Jogi tapes meaningless or morally invalid. But, of course, those standards have now been reversed.

So those are the four paradoxes of Tehelka. Everybody accepts that this was the greatest investigative story of our times and yet few journalists will attempt to adopt its methods; that the targets of Tehelka flourish while Tehelka itself has closed down; that while journalists have steered clear of stinging politicians, the politicians themselves are happy to sting each other; and that the BJP which once told us how immoral Tehelka's methods were has used exactly the same techniques to trap Ajit Jogi.

It's a funny old world we live in, isn't it?

Drawing the Ram-rekha

RAJDEEP SARDESAI

IT was a threat in full gaze of the television camera. On 15 December 2002, Narendra Modi gave us an interview barely a few hours after he had recorded a massive two-thirds victory in the Gujarat elections. We asked him about the feeling of insecurity and anxiety that still prevailed among Gujarat's minorities. Basking in the afterglow of the triumph, a stern chief minister remarked: 'What insecurity are you talking about? People like you should apologize to the five crore Gujaratis for asking such questions. Have you not learnt your lesson? If you continue like this, you will have to pay the price.'

Ironically, the interview took place at the BJP headquarters in Ahmedabad, where even as the chief minister spoke of a Gujarat free from fear, journalists had to escape with the aid of a hose pipe at the back of the building to avoid being confronted by a frenzied mob of Modi supporters.

* The views expressed here are personal and do not purport to represent the views of the channel for which the author works.

For viewers, the Modi threat might have been reality television with a difference. For journalists who had been covering the violence in Gujarat it was just another example of the politics of intimidation that had marked state behaviour towards the media. Right through last year's incessant coverage of Gujarat, journalists were targeted.¹ The television camera in particular became a soft target. Somehow, the fact that this was the first riot in the full glare of 24-hour news channels created a siege syndrome within the state establishment and its supporters. Not surprisingly, the media was accused of 'inflaming passions' and 'instigating mobs'.

On March 1, two days after the violence began, the state government sought to ban the Star News channel because the Modi government claimed that the channel was guilty of 'incitement'. Nor was the concerted attack

1. For more details read *Communalism Combat*, March-April 2002, page 102 or the report of the fact-finding team of the Editors Guild.

on the media confined to one channel. Reporters of both Zee News and Aaj Tak were at various stages warned of dire consequences if they persisted with their coverage of the violence. Other print reporters and photographers were also issued similar warning.

Perhaps the most graphic example of the mindset of the state machinery was provided on 8 April 2002 when the Ahmedabad police assaulted two dozen photographers and reporters at the historic Gandhi Ashram. Their ‘crime’: they were covering two peace meetings, including one attended by Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar. That the abode of the Mahatma should be so defiled by naked violence is shocking in itself. That there was so little protest within and outside the media of this act of madness is only further evidence of how not just the state, but even civil society had slipped into a dangerous abyss.

Nor was this particularly surprising. One of the great successes of the Modi government was the ease with which it was able to shape a post-Godhra polarization. This polarization reflected itself in the behaviour of civil society and the media. Several Gujarati dailies, most notably *Sandesh*, chose to print in banner headlines stories of how Muslim youth were engaged in ‘revenge attacks’ and how ‘arms had been found in mosques.’ The stories were false and designed, it would seem, to accentuate a climate of hatred and anger between communities. Ironically, the same chief minister who chose to attack the private national news channels for inflaming passions did not think twice before commending the local newspapers for supporting his government.

In a letter to Sandesh, Modi wrote: ‘The newspapers of the state

played a decisive role as a link between the people and the government. You have served the humanity in a big way. It is the state government’s primary duty to restore peace, security and communal harmony when violence takes place. It is noteworthy that the newspapers of Gujarat gave their full support to the state government in undertaking this difficult task. I am happy to note that your newspaper exercised restraint during the communal disturbances in the wake of the Godhra incident. I am grateful to you.’

Contrast this letter with the open threat that Modi issued to us on 15 December. For Modi, the contrasting responses were, at one level, part of a deliberate attempt to create a wider divide between the ‘local’ media and the English language ‘national’ media. In Modi’s propaganda strategy, the local media was to be wooed for being in tune with ‘local’ sentiments, i.e., the strong Hindutva sentiments of the state. The English language media was to be abused because it reflected the pseudo-secular mindset of the elite. The English language media was therefore pigeonholed as the ultimate enemy of the people of Gujarat because it did not reflect their popular expressions, unlike the regional media which ‘understood’ the anguish of the majority.

But, at another level, the contrasting responses of the Modi government to different sections of the media only reflect the nature of the relationship between the state leadership and the media. Those who toe the line will be ‘rewarded’ and ‘seduced’ with letters of commendation, Rajya Sabha seats, Padma awards and more (several of the cheerleaders of the Modi regime within the national media were invited by the state government for Modi’s swearing in ceremony as ‘special guests’ of the chief minister

and parked in five star hotels at state expense). Those who chose to express their dissent and question the political leadership were intimidated with threats of violence and dismissed as ‘anti-national’ and worse. Those who chose to expose the ugly realities of the Gujarat violence were accused of ‘inflaming passions’; those who chose to hide the truth, and often mis-report it, were commended for their ‘restraint’.

Nor have the attacks and discrimination towards a section of the media really stopped in Gujarat. The violence may have ended, but the intimidation has not. Those channels and newspapers who are critical of the chief minister are not invited to his press conferences and denied the basic right to information by the state apparatus. Moreover, Modi’s thumping victory in the last elections appears to have pushed the media on the defensive, to the point where there is a growing reluctance to focus on the continuing discrimination of the minorities in the state. It’s almost as if the sustained propaganda of an election victory being seen as a popular referendum of the Modi government’s actions has convinced the media that it is on the losing side in Gujarat’s ideological war. The resultant inhibitions within the media on revisiting the Gujarat story are a sign that state intimidation has eventually won out.

But why blame just Narendra Modi or single out the Gujarat establishment? Modi and Gujarat, in a sense, is last year’s story. Various leaders are still carrying out intimidation as a tool to silence the media into submission at various levels. Some like L.K. Advani now virtually refuse to be interviewed by anyone other than those who are identified with their ‘camp’. The day the deputy prime minister was absolved in the Ayodhya

case, his office made it clear that Advani would make a statement but would take no questions.

This refusal to be quizzed is part of a mindset which is increasingly contemptuous of a media seen to have little more than nuisance value. At least Advani occasionally gives an interview; Congress President Sonia Gandhi has remained remarkably free of any media scrutiny, quite simply because the Congress leadership seems to believe that journalists ought to be content with innocuous sound bites. At the heart of such behaviour is an imperious disregard for democratic principles, and notions of freedom of information and political accountability.

Indeed, authoritarian mindsets when it comes to media-politician equations now cut across all political divides. In Tamil Nadu, Modi has found a soul mate in Jayalalithaa, who too has shown little restraint in openly targeting the media at any given opportunity (her attack on *The Hindu* newspaper because it chose to editorially comment on her style of functioning is only one example of the utter disregard she has for any notion of an independent press). In Chhattisgarh, Congress Chief Minister Ajit Jogi has found his own novel way of quashing any show of press dissent. Using a local cable network as his weapon, Jogi has ensured that no criticism of his government is carried across the airwaves. The moment any channel airs an anti-Jogi report, the network with a virtual monopoly in the state either blacks out the channel or removes it from the prime band.

Hardly surprising then that in several states across the country cable operators have strong political affiliations. Controlling the cable networks gives the state politicians unbridled

access and power over the news broadcasting system. Whether it is the Shiv Sena in suburban Mumbai or the DMK in Tamil Nadu or Jogi's cronies in Chhattisgarh, there are enough examples of political parties and local satraps controlling the cable networks for political ends. It is these very forces within the cable industry who were partly responsible for ensuring that the conditional access system (CAS) was deferred. Indeed, the very fact that the I & B minister had to personally visit Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray to seek his 'permission' for CAS is indicative, not just of the peculiar pressures under which the present coalition government at the Centre operates, but also how deeply the cable industry is intertwined with political interests.

Cable operators are just one pawn in the state power machine. Today, even the satellite industry is closely connected with political interests. In the case of Sun television, the financial and political control of the DMK is direct and obvious, given that the family of the DMK leadership owns the channel. But there are other, less direct means of control as well. For example, the Centre has ruthlessly used its uplinking and equity guidelines to ensure that the so-called 'foreign' satellite channels are made to fall in line. The Star News soap opera which saw the channel being given weekly extensions is a classic example of how the state machinery can still use its discretionary power to ensure a measure of control over a channel's content.

After all, how will a channel that is completely dependent on the government's policy shifts for its continuance ever actually be politically neutral in its editorial stance? Is it any wonder that central government leaders are privately gloating that

there is at least one satellite news channel which will toe the establishment line in an election year? If Rupert Murdoch has never hesitated to abandon journalistic principles for business interests across the globe, why should India be any different?

Ironically, the hastily formed Indian Media Group which protested against the special favours that were being granted to Star News and demanded a level playing field too cannot really claim to occupy the moral high ground. Among the members of this group were editor-proprietors with strong political links (at least one of them is a Congress Rajya Sabha MP). The self-styled leader of this group was Subroto Roy Sahara, someone who has never hidden his personal connections with UP Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Samajwadi Party leadership. Mulayam may not have a direct stake in Sahara television, but such is his proximity to this business group that it is almost a given that the Samajwadi Party leader and his Sancho Panza, Amar Singh are regularly featured on the channel. Would a Sahara in such circumstances dare to carry a critical story on the Samajwadi Party leadership? And can the Indian Media Group really claim to represent 'independent' media interests when its leadership is so strongly politically aligned?

Perhaps, because the state is so aware of the weaknesses of the country's media elite that it seems supremely confident that it can actually get away with attempts to either muzzle or else co-opt it. Take the decision to re-launch Doordarshan Metro as a 24 hour news and current affairs channel. At its launch, the CEO of Prasar Bharti remarked that the DD News channel would be used 'as a tool of information to empower the people to take the right decisions.'

Simply put, what the civil servant meant is that the government would have another propaganda weapon to make sure that the Indian voter falls in line. The press conference also claimed that the new channel would be truly autonomous because it would be governed by the Prasar Bharti Corporation and not by the Government of India. The fact is that while the act may have visualized Prasar Bharti as an independent entity, the reality is that the body is today an adjunct of the government in power (its chairman is a journalist who got the job because he wrote often enough in the RSS journal *Organiser* glorifying the Hindutva ideology).

The new channel, according to government estimates, has been given an initial budget of Rs 54 crore, that will be increased over the next few years. Nor is this the first such news channel to be launched by the government in recent years. In fact, launching high-cost news channels appears to have become a trend for I&B ministers relishing the idea of the state being involved in the 'news business', and projecting a 'shining India'. Last year, in response to a parliamentary question, it was revealed that crores of rupees had been handed out to senior editors/producers to do news programmes for Doordarshan. Some of the production houses are genuine; several of them are just out to make a quick buck. In most of the cases, the programmes were either unwatchable or simply used recycled content.

Yet, no one within the media really complained about this total waste of the taxpayer's money. Why would anyone when the country's top editors were hosting the programmes with great aplomb? Indeed, nowhere in the world perhaps is there the kind of cross-media cannibalization that

exists within the Indian media today where newspaper editors can freelance with private channels and even host programmes for the state media. The government's *mantra* is simple: hand out a sufficient number of television programmes to senior journalists, and then buy their 'credibility' and 'loyalty'.

The result of this blurring of lines is that an increasingly craven media has steadily lost the moral authority to really take on the establishment, whether represented by corporate or political interests. In a recent book, *Journalism After September 11* (edited by Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, Routledge), the authors argue how the uniquely traumatic and unprecedented events of September 11 transformed media organizations – print and television – into outriders of the Bush government. The ideological assumption underlying media behaviour was that this was a time to drape the Stars and Stripes and those who questioned official policy were only giving aid and comfort to the enemy. It's a philosophy that is now so deeply 'embedded' that it gave the entire notion of war journalism an entirely different meaning during the Iraq war when most of the American networks acted as an extension of the Bush administration.

In a sense, the propaganda machine in our country is no different today, with journalists who step out of line being labelled as anti-national. The difference is that while the response of the American media may have been at least partly shaped by the sheer shock of September 11, there has been no similar cataclysmic event here that has shaken journalism (the December 13 attack on Parliament comes the closest). Yet our media hasn't thought twice before compromising the ability of journalism to

ensure a free and non-partisan flow of information.

So what protection really exists for the journalist who, without being overly self-righteous, would simply like to do his job? Frankly, very little. The Press Council remains a toothless tiger, and few believe that if its jurisdiction, as has been proposed, were extended to include the electronic media as well, it would gather any additional bite. The Editors Guild can make well-meaning statements, but again the loss of authority of the editor has diluted the ability of the Guild to actually represent the long-term interests of the professional journalist.

Within the electronic news media, there isn't even such a collective body that can issue a joint statement. Such are the competitive urges of today's news channels that it seems unlikely such a grouping to uphold issues of journalistic independence will be formed in the immediate future. During the Gujarat riots, for example, one channel openly 'celebrated' on air the state government's decision to censor or blackout channels, with the anchor virtually justifying the line that the media was responsible for inflaming passions.

Salvation then must lie with the conscience of individual journalists, and their ability to evolve a basic code of conduct by drawing a *Lakshman rekha* as to what is acceptable and what is not. After all, for every editor who has sold out at a bargain price, there are still any number of reporters, camerapersons and media professionals in a variety of channels and newspapers who carry on with the daily business of telling a story. It's the sheer pluralism and collective strength of these individuals that offer reason for hope. Even while the Modis, Jayalalithaas and Jogis persist with their politics of intimidation.

The Islamic mirror of Hindutva

JYOTIRMAYA SHARMA

AS the progenitor and most eloquent theoretician of political Hindutva, Savarkar formulated his entire world-view in terms of well-entrenched, non-negotiable, binary oppositions. His universe is strictly divided into 'friends' and 'foes', 'us' and 'them', 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', 'Hindus' and 'non-Hindus', 'righteous' and 'wicked'. In a rare advaitic vein – for Savarkar had little time for philosophic schools of Hinduism and was deeply suspicious of *advaita* – he talks of the nature of the 'Self' as something that was 'known to itself immutably and without a name or even a form.' This abstract notion of the 'Self', however, gets transformed the moment 'it comes in contact or conflict with a non-self.' At this juncture the 'Self' requires a name in order to communicate with the non-self.

The self and the non-self in Savarkar's case were invariably in conflict and in an antagonistic relation. In his scheme of things, it was inconceivable for the self and the non-self to share a creative and happy relationship. The more Savarkar engaged in formulating the contours of his ideal of Hindutva and giving it a political edge, the greater was the proliferation of the non-selves. Islam and 'Mohammadans' constituted the primary definition of the non-self. Later, it was the English and Christianity. Curiously enough, the Buddha and Buddhism

and Mahatma Gandhi and ahimsa were eventually added to his rogue's gallery of non-selves.

Apologists of Savarkar's brand of Hindutva have often argued that all his utterances ought to be seen in the context of Indian nationalism of the 19th and 20th centuries. They argue that Savarkar should be viewed as a patriot and a revolutionary nationalist determined to secure India's freedom from the British. While Savarkar was certainly part of the nationalist movement, his commitment to the creation of a Hindu Rashtra superceded the goal of political independence for India. The very definition and conception of Hindu Rashtra depended entirely on its relation with its primary non-self, the Muslims.

Before the Muslims invaded India – Savarkar uses the words Hindusthan or Sindhusthan or Saptasindhu – it was a land of peace, plenty and a sense of false security. There were internal differences of regions, identities and castes but these were welded together in a great synthesis, a tremendous 'mahaamilan'. The coming of the Muslims disturbed this idyllic picture: 'At last she was rudely awakened on the day when Mohammed of Gazni crossed the Indus, the frontier line of Sindhusthan, and invaded her. That day the conflict of life and death began. Nothing makes [the] Self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with [the] non-self. Nothing can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites.'

* Extracted from *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, Penguin-Viking, 2003, with permission:

Savarkar saw this as a ghastly conflict that continued 'day after day, decade after decade, century after century' till such time as Shivaji established a Hindu Empire, a Hindu-Pad-Padshahi.

The conflict with the mlechhas and *yavanas*—the 'outcastes' and 'outsiders'—defined Hindu identity and constituted the Hindus as a nation. In the course of this conflict, 'our people became intensely conscious of ourselves as Hindus and we were welded into a nation to an extent unknown in our history'. What brought about this unity was the presence of the 'enemy': 'The enemies hated us as Hindus and the whole family of peoples and races, of sects and creeds that flourished from Attock to Cuttack was suddenly individualized into a single Being... For it was one great issue to defend the honour and independence of Hindusthan and maintain the cultural unity and civic life of Hindutva and not Hinduism alone, but Hindutva – i.e., Hindu-dharma—that was being fought out on the hundred fields of battle as well as on the floor of the chambers of diplomacy.'

All territory from the river Attock to the Indian Ocean was to be freed from the hands of the Muslims. The goal of the Hindus was the same as that of Shivaji: Re-acquire territories, rehabilitate religion, preserve Vedas and Shastras, protect cows and Brahmins, establishment of suzerainty and diffusion of Hindu fame and glory. These were the sentiments expressed in a letter Govindrao Kale wrote to Nana Fadnavis, which for Savarkar was the truest expression of Hindu history.

There are various ways to understand Savarkar's attitude towards the Muslims. There are several instances in his works where this 'struggle of life and death with the Muhammadan power' is relegated to merely a ques-

tion of remembering the past and documenting it truthfully. In his author's foreword to Hindu-Pad-Padashahi, Savarkar sports an extremely liberal attitude when he says, 'It would be as suicidal and as ridiculous to borrow hostilities and combats of the past only to fight them out into the present, as it would be for a Hindu and a Muhammadan to lock each other suddenly in a death-grip while embracing, only because Shivaji and Afzalkhan had done so hundreds of years ago.' The anti-Muslim rhetoric after 1937 can also be seen as a reaction to Congress politics and the politics of the Muslim League. None of these instances, however, explain sufficiently Savarkar's obsessive preoccupation with Islam and the Muslims.

ing other religions as passports to hell and all efforts to root out these satanic strongholds by force or fraud as highly meritorious is, other things being equal, better fitted to fight and vanquish its opponents and rule over them when opposed to a community which belongs not to a militant church at all, condemns the use of force, nay going further, would not like to receive back into its fold even those who were forcibly carried away from its bosom, which prizes individual worship more than a public one and thus develops no organ or organization for a common defence of their faith as a church and which, lacking thus in the cohesion and the public strength that it engenders, fails to replace it by any other principle like love for the common motherland or, common race, or a common kingdom, or a state powerful enough to weld them all into an organic whole and render them dedicated to its defence and glory with as fierce a fervour as their opponents put forth.'

The truth is that Savarkar greatly admired the Muslims. For him, they represented all that was deficient or missing in the Hindus. While Savarkar would remain committed to a Hindu God or Dev, and a Hindu Rashtra or Desh, he greatly admired the political and religious fervour of Islam. In Hindu-Pad-Padashahi, subtitled 'A Review of the Hindu Empire of Maharashtra', Savarkar speaks about the first Muslim invasions in India: 'At the time of the first inroads of the Muhammadans, the fierce unity of Faith, that social cohesion and valorous fervour which made them as a body so irresistible, were qualities in which the Hindus proved woefully wanting.'

He goes on to praise the single-mindedness of Muslim religiosity and sense of solidarity:

'[I]t must be clearly mentioned that in whatever manner the absolute merits or demerits of a militant church be judged from the point of view of expansion of political and religious conquests, the community that is out for the propagation of their faith and is taught the fierce doctrines of belief-

The Muslims possessed qualities that made them unassailable whereas the Hindus suffered limitations handed over to them by metaphysics and tradition:

'The Muhammadans when they came, found a source of irresistible strength in the principle of theocratic unity, indissolubly wedded to a sense of duty to reduce all the world to a sense of obedience to theocracy, an Empire under the direct supervision of God. The Hindus wedded to individual liberty and philosophic views of life and the ultimate cause of causes, fallen a prey to the most decentralizing and disabling institutions and superstitions, such as the one that prevented them from crossing their frontiers and thus threw them always on the defensive and whose political organizations were more personal

than patriotic, had naturally from a national point of view degenerated into a congeries of small states bound together but very loosely by a sense of common civilization, were more conscious of the differences that divided them provincially, sectionally and religiously, than of the factors that bound them and marked them out as one people.'

The Hindus had to learn a great deal from them about building a commonly shared national life and consolidating the place of faith in their commonly shared lives:

'As an individual to an individual, the Hindu was as valorous and devoted to his faith as a Moslem. But community to a community, people to a people, the Muhammadans were fiercely united by a theocratic patriotism that incited them to do or die under the banner of their God and invested every effort to spread political rule over the unbelievers with the sanctity of a holy war. But as years and even centuries rolled by, the Hindus too learnt the bitter lesson and under the pressure of a common danger, became more conscious of those ties that united them as a people and marked them out as a nation than the factors that divided them. They too began to feel as Hindus first and everything else afterwards and sadly realized the weaknesses that had crept into their national life by an inherent tendency to isolate thought and action, a general lack of community of feeling and pride and national sympathy. Slowly they absorbed much that contributed to the success of the Muhammadans.'

It would be instructive here to recapitulate Savarkar's central thesis regarding what made the Muslims so 'irresistible'. The Muslims had a unified church, which was lacking in the Hindus. This made them better equipped to take on their opponents.

They had a sense of community that ultimately helped in bringing about a sense of national unity. In sharp contrast, the Hindus were hopelessly divided in terms of schools of philosophy, debilitating metaphysical propositions, castes and a surfeit of conventions masquerading as tradition. Muslims acted under the direct command of God, had a notion of theocracy, which helped their militant campaigns against the *kafirs*. The Hindus were left to reconcile doctrines such as the Karma theory and principled opposition to use of force, all of which lead to a disjunction between theory and practice.

In short, the 'self' had 'absorbed' a great deal of the non-self, leading it to redefine itself. The tormentors had proved to be teachers. A great deal of what Savarkar had learned from the Muslims would ultimately determine his conception of political Hindutva. He had to accept the brutal embrace of the intimate enemy.

While the Hindu 'Self' had 'learned' and 'absorbed' several attributes of the non-self, it could not allow the non-self to emasculate its identity completely. The 'Self' had to remain distinct and have autonomy of its own. Having begun on a premise that Hindus were deficient in several respects when compared to the Muslims, Savarkar now had the task of distancing himself from too close a comparison with the traditional adversary. After all, the Hindus and Muslims were, according to him, locked in a life and death battle with each other over centuries.

It was, therefore, important for Hindus to prove their strength and 'seek retribution for the wrongs done to them as a nation and a race'. Any attempt to extend a hand of friendship to the Muslims, or accept a hand extended by the Muslims, had to be

based on perfect equality. This, for Savarkar, was accomplished when the forces of 'Hindudom' entered Delhi triumphantly in 1761 and ensured that 'the Moslem throne and crown and standard lay hammered at the feet of Bhau and Vishwas.' This event singularly heralded the possibility of an honourable unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. This would have been impossible, asserts Savarkar, without conquering the conqueror and dethroning the enthroned. But the principle was clear: No retribution, no friendship.

Savarkar's portrayal of the establishment in 1761 of Hindu-Pad-Padashahi, the Hindu Empire, was an instance of Hindus regaining a sense of self-possession and parity with Muslims. It was, however, only a theoretical possibility and remained firmly entrenched in the realm of history writing. In another instance of history writing, Savarkar comes close to exhibiting that Hindus and Muslims, after all, were 'blood brothers'.

His account of the War of Independence of 1857, written while he was in England, several years before Savarkar wrote Hindu-Pad-Padashahi, makes a strong case for 'feelings of mutual friendship' between the Hindus and the Muslims. He started writing this extended essay in 1907. There is acknowledgement in it of the enmity between Hindus and Muslims but that is brushed aside as being 'born out of ignorance'. In fact there are lyrical passages in it where Savarkar talks about members of the two antagonistic faiths partaking of the 'same milk of the breasts of the Motherland' and becoming one. There is little in this text, which prepares the reader to comprehend Savarkar's subsequent outbursts against the Muslims in works like *Hindutva* and in his speeches at the annual sessions of the Hindu Mahasabha.

Kashmir through the looking glass

PRAVEEN SWAMI

'It's very good jam,' said the Queen.
'Well, I don't want any today, at any rate.'
'You couldn't have it if you did want it,' the Queen said. 'The rule is jam tomorrow and jam yesterday but never jam today.'
'It must come sometimes to "jam today",' Alice objected.
'No it can't,' said the Queen. 'It's jam every other day; today isn't any other day, you know.'
'I don't understand you,' said Alice. 'It's dreadfully confusing.'

Lewis Carroll,
Through the Looking Glass, 1871

DIALOGUE on peace in Jammu and Kashmir has passed through the mirror between the real world and into that strange place Lewis Carroll called Wonderland. Here all participants must submit to the tyranny of meaninglessness. At once, they are overcome by a compulsive urge to decode the babble that passes for dialogue, and to search for sense in even the most trivial and insignificant text.

Six months ago Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee announced in Srinagar that 'spring will return to the beautiful Valley soon, the flowers will bloom again and the nightingales will return, chirping.' So far, the only chirping to be heard is that of the Kalashnikov – but heard from within Wonderland, it would seem, the ugly

staccato rattle of gunfire contains within it the muted strains of birdsong.

Inside Wonderland, as Carroll told us, many impossible things are possible. A most extraordinary consensus has evolved – uniting everyone from paid-up hawks in the Bharatiya Janata Party's policy establishment to South Delhi liberals who normally break out in a rash at the mere mention of the party's name – that Vajpayee's effort to secure peace in Jammu and Kashmir is valourous, brave and pure. Pakistan, high officials preen, has been shamed worldwide by the sheer generosity of the prime minister; in the Kashmir valley, the veil has fallen from the eyes of people long held in thrall by the evil temptress across the border; and Lo! soon it will be summer and crowds of dollar-laden tourists will throng the clear waters of the Chasm-e-Shahi.

It isn't hard to understand the desperation for peace within and outside Jammu and Kashmir. Over thirty thousand people – civilians, security personnel, and yes, terrorists – have died in the decade and a half of carnage there. And yet, it has always seemed that peace, like the Queen's jam, is something always around the corner

or just lost; something that could have been achieved yesterday or could be achieved tomorrow, but somehow never today. Now peace, of course, is a good thing. No one can seriously dispute this unless, as Morris Chafetz famously said, 'One wishes to be considered against motherhood or for sin.'

Yet, very serious questions about both the content and assumptions of the ongoing peace process need to be addressed. First, do the participants in dialogue actually have the capability to deliver its stated objective, a significant or even de-escalation of hostilities? Second, is the dialogue structured in a way that makes such an outcome likely? Third, what consequences might the dialogue process have for the legitimacy of those who choose to place themselves outside it? Fourth, and perhaps most important, can the dialogue process address the interest of key participants in sabotaging any movement towards peace that excludes them?

Raising these questions may be considered a little impolite, like belching at a banquet. Nonetheless, the questions do need to be answered if anyone is indeed serious about making available *jam today*. While I will argue that the peace initiative of October 2003 is irredeemably flawed, serious peace making *is* indeed possible. It needs to be premised, however, on the making of rational choices and distinctions, not sentimentality.

Into the mirror: On the face of it, the peace initiative marks a sharp break with months of publicly stated policy, one that is all the more mystifying since it comes on the eve of elections where a soft line on Jammu and Kashmir could cost the Hindu right dearly.

On 25 September 2003 speaking before the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Vajpayee had made the blunt assertion that no

dialogue was possible unless Pakistan-backed terrorism ended. 'When cross-border terrorism stops,' the Indian prime minister had said, 'or when we eradicate it, we can have a dialogue with Pakistan on the other issues between us.'

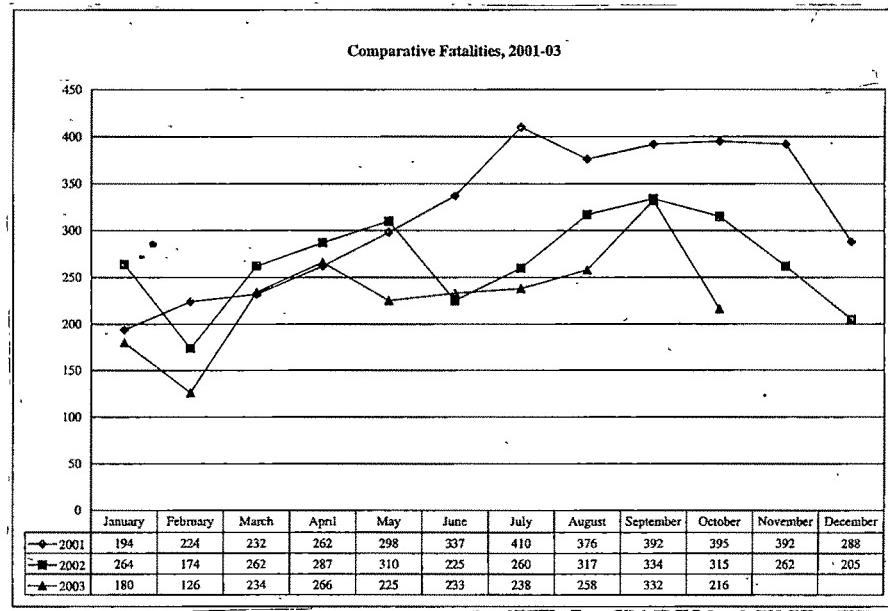
intense United States of America pressure to give their war on terrorism ally, General Pervez Musharraf, some legitimacy-inducing concession on Jammu and Kashmir. This school of thought points to a dramatic reduction in fatalities in Jammu in Kashmir in October, which fell to a record low compared to the same month in 2001 and 2002 – and, indeed, to a level not seen after March this year.

A day later, he seemed equally pessimistic on the prospects of a dialogue with the Kul Jamaat Hurriyat Conference (All Parties Hurriyat Conference: APHC). The APHC, he said, 'wants a special invitation, *which I cannot understand*' [my emphasis]. The Union government had already extended, he pointed out, 'a general invitation to all.' Evidently, understanding dawned on the prime minister sometime in the weeks after his New York visit. The new peace initiative was announced on October 22; we know from the public testimony of former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah that informal consultations on the issue started some two weeks earlier.

Several explanations have been offered for this sudden turnaround. Some observers believe there was

If one makes the supposition that this unprecedented reduction was the consequence of a decision by Pakistan's military and intelligence establishment, Musharraf can interpret the fall to be a part meeting of India's no-terrorism precondition. Notably, Musharraf had earlier seemed to suggest that he would use his influence with terrorist groups to secure a de-escalation of violence if dialogue began. Prime Minister Vajpayee had responded to this offer in New York by asserting that India refused 'to let terrorism become an instrument of blackmail.'

Advocates of the United States-pressure thesis point to several other



Source: Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

Figures include civilian, security force and terrorist fatalities.

pieces of evidence. On 29 October, deposing before a House Sub Committee on International Relations, United States Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca singled out Musharraf for effusive praise. 'Despite sceptical public opinion and bitter criticism from a coalition of opposition parties,' she said, 'President Musharraf has maintained Pakistan's policy of supporting U.S. operations, with practical results.'

Pakistan, she continued, was doing what it could on Jammu and Kashmir. 'We look to Pakistan to do everything in its power to prevent extremist groups operating from its soil from crossing the Line of Control,' she said. 'The Government of Pakistan has taken many steps to curb infiltration, but we are asking it to redouble its efforts.' Rocca proceeded to call for 'dialogue and peaceful solutions to disagreements in the region,' including with 'militants in Kashmir.' Answering questions, she held India and Pakistan equally responsible for what she described as an 'impasse'.

Rocca's use of the terms 'extremists' and 'militants' are instructive, particularly since several of these figure on the United States government's own list of foreign terrorist organizations. Notably, however, the United States did throw India a bone on the eve of the 22 October Cabinet Committee on Security meeting in New Delhi, with its Treasury Department designating Mafioso Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar a terrorist. The Treasury Department gave out a Karachi telephone number for Dawood Ibrahim, affirming Indian claims that the principal Mumbai serial bombing accused was indeed in Pakistan.

None of this, of course, was news in India; any self-respecting Mumbai crime reporter could have provided the telephone number, along

with those of Dawood Ibrahim's key aide, 'Chhota' Shakeel Ahmad Babu. Nor does the Treasury Department's action compel Pakistan to hand over Dawood Ibrahim to India. None the less, the action may have given pro-United States ministers the leverage they needed within the Cabinet, since Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani had made something of a fetish of the issue in the past.

Finally, other dots on the map also suggest considerable behind the scenes United States intervention. In mid-November 2003, the Pakistan government announced a sudden renewal of its forgotten 2001 proscription of the Jaish-e-Mohammad. The first ban was made in response to United States fiat after the attack on India's Parliament building in New Delhi. Soon afterwards, however, supposedly banned groups resumed operations with considerable freedom, both in Punjab and Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Considerable open source literature, notably Mohammad Amir Rana's encyclopaedic account, *Jihad-e-Kashmir Aur Afghanistan*, and investigative articles by the journalist Mohammad Shehzad, show the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad continued to run training camps, recruit cadre and gather funds with not-so-tacit official sponsorship after the first ban. That the Pakistan government seems unable, at the time of writing, to apprehend Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar, suggests this ban may not be wholly serious. None the less, the gesture is significant: the United States, it could be argued, is keen to ensure that a pre-2001 threshold is observed to rule out the risk of a bruising South Asia escalation at a time when it seems inextricably mired in Iraq.

A second major line of explanation also, however, exists for Jammu and Kashmir policy-making. Prime Minister Vajpayee, this school of thought runs, is deeply concerned with his place in history – or, cynics contend, a Nobel Peace Prize – and genuinely wishes to push ahead with a negotiated settlement on Jammu and Kashmir.

There is little doubt Vajpayee has shown an extraordinary – critics within his party would say, suicidal – urge to push for peace in Jammu and Kashmir. The contours of his policy thrust became evident in the winter of 2000, just a year after India's military triumph in the Kargil war. Hoping to strengthen pro-dialogue elements within the Hizb-ul-Mujaheddin led by dissident commander Abdul Majid Dar, Vajpayee initiated the five-month Ramzan ceasefire. Indian troops were ordered not to initiate offensive combat operations, while New Delhi began a covert dialogue with Dar and APHC centrists. Although official India is profoundly reluctant to admit the facts on this issue, the ceasefire was a profoundly unhappy experience.

Union Ministry of Home Affairs data shows that measured by almost any conceivable index, terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir actually escalated during this time. Paradoxically for an effort intended to end killings, the Ramzan ceasefire actually ended claiming more lives than in the corresponding months of previous years. The ceasefire eventually collapsed, but Planning Commission Chairman K.C. Pant was appointed as the Union government's first official interlocutor to continue the dialogue process.

Pant formally invited the APHC to join the dialogue soon after his appointment in April 2001. It never responded to the letter. Geelani, then part of the APHC, demanded that it be allowed to visit Pakistan as a precon-

dition to dialogue. Others, like Abdul Gani Lone, were more sympathetic to the Pant mission, but could not carry the organization with them. Shabbir Shah, a secessionist leader outside the APHC umbrella, also received a letter, and responded by asking for several clarifications. A desultory dialogue followed, with few results.

Pant, insiders say, came to believe that Shah might be interested in joining the election process under the right conditions, but nothing of the kind eventually happened. Vohra replaced Pant this year and issued a press release inviting all interested parties to dialogue. Ansari, soon after his appointment to office, dismissed the invitation out of hand, described Vohra as a 'clerk' and demanded direct dialogue with the prime minister. Vohra is known to have met both Advani and Vajpayee in the days before the CCS meeting, at which he is present. Sources say the hard-nosed bureaucrat made clear his mission had reached a dead-end, and that any further progress would require the government to make larger concessions to the APHC centrists.

Despite Vohra's frustrations, however, the government and APHC had in fact remained in contact. Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Brajesh Mishra, and Officer on Special Duty A.S. Dullat, are believed to have held a series of covert meetings with top APHC figures. Former Union Minister Ram Jethmalani, in turn, conducted a parallel dialogue process through his own Kashmir Committee, which functioned as a sounding board for new ideas.

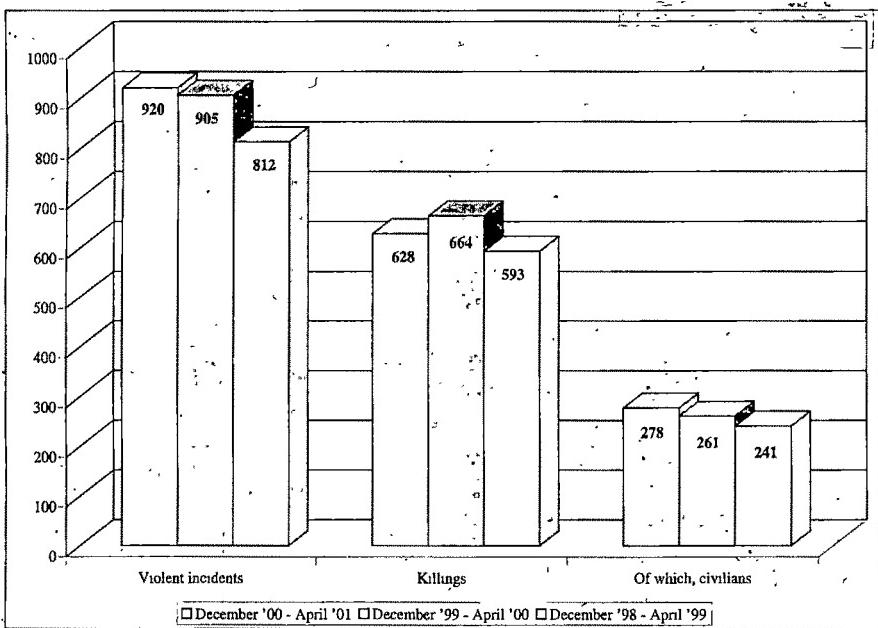
'to Delhi,' Advani said, 'the Centre would have no objection to keep the door open for talks informally.' From here to the October peace offering was just a small step – if policy makers chose to pretend the New York episode had never happened.

When Vajpayee visited Srinagar this April, his renewed calls for dialogue added impetus to this quiet peace dialogue. The next month, Ansari revived the idea of visiting Pakistan, much to the ire of the Islamists around Geelani, who felt they would be kept out of such an initiative. Meanwhile, the APHC itself split down the middle, and the Prime Minister's Office came to believe it needed to make fresh concessions in order to strengthen the centrists. During a meeting of the Inter-State Council in August, Advani offered the APHC an 'informal dialogue' that bypassed Vohra. If the APHC 'desired to come

We may never really know just what provoked the decision to launch a fresh peace initiative – at least, that is, until those who participated in it write their memoirs. We do not know why Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani was charged with negotiating with the APHC, or what road-map the Union Government had in mind for the talks. The CCS is believed to have discussed the peace initiative for a little over half an hour; no voices of dissent were raised:

Despite the magical illusion of a dramatic breakthrough, however, there appears to be no clear plan for transforming dialogue with the APHC into a material reality. APHC Chief Maulvi Abbas Ansari, who was present in New Delhi when the CCS meeting took place, at first welcomed the announcement. 'Advani's appointment has come a little late but it is a good step,' said Ansari. Soon afterwards, however, the APHC centrists began a process of in-house consultation, which insiders say could last up to a month.

Yasin Malik's faction of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front opposed a two-way dialogue with India just this August, while the breakaway parallel APHC formation led by Islamist hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani seems hostile to any repast commencing on a table at which it has not been invited to be present. To top it all off, New Delhi has yet to respond to the APHC's demand for a formal invitation to dialogue. While the APHC wants written confirmation that the dialogue would address its



demands for secession, the Union government has obvious concerns about making any such emphatic admission. No consensus exists within the government, too, on the demands by the mainstream APHC to visit Pakistan to hold a dialogue with secessionist and terrorist groups based there.

Advani himself seemed keen to circumscribe the limits of the dialogue agenda well before it begins. On 24 October, he insisted that 'the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country cannot be compromised,' an obvious reference to the APHC's insistence that secessionist demands be brought to the table. Instead, he suggested an alternative limitation for dialogue, well short even of the demands made for federal autonomy by several mainstream parties in Jammu and Kashmir. 'We don't want that all the powers remain confined to Delhi or for that matter to the state capitals alone,' Advani said. 'We favour decentralization and are prepared to take steps for that.'

It is possible that this formulation was addressed as much to the Prime Minister as to the APHC. On 8 May, Vajpayee had suggested the prospect of an 'alternate arrangement' on Jammu and Kashmir, a term that some read to mean one that in some fashion significantly diluted India's current structure of sovereignty. On the twelve-step proposals for Pakistan, Advani was even more emphatic: 'Our stance is the same, that Pakistan has to stop cross-border terrorism, destroy the terrorist infrastructure and build a congenial atmosphere before any talks can begin.'

Before taking the next step forward, however, New Delhi might have to carefully sweep the area for hidden mines. First, past experiences with public domain peacemaking

have not been heartening. Groups like the Jamait-ul-Mujaheddin, Hizb-ul-Mujaheddin and Jaish-e-Mohammad have already made clear their dislike for the nascent dialogue with the APHC. This should surprise no one, for jihadi groups will not be present at the table; they have an interest in ensuring that the banquet is disrupted. Pakistan, which also has limited leverage over the centrists, will do its best to ensure that a dialogue which does not include it goes nowhere. Its frank recognition of the Islamist faction of the APHC is indicative of things to come.

While Pakistan's links to the political establishment that *represents* – but does not *control* – terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir may have been severed, a new kite is now flying, firmly anchored to hands in Islamabad. Then, as National Conference leader Omar Abdullah has pointed out, New Delhi's failure to invite extremists like Geelani to the table may prove costly. Should the dialogue prove unable to secure peace, or yield no short-term results, the Islamists will be strengthened, and the centrists de-legitimised.

Pakistan itself, second, has no clear incentives to de-escalate violence in Jammu and Kashmir. Its best-case scenario is, of course, that India will one day, sooner or later, tire of waging a war without end, and make concessions that will allow the Pakistani military establishment to perpetuate itself as the institution that realized the unfinished business of Partition. Its worst-case scenario, however, isn't half as bad from a purely pragmatic point of view – that three entire Indian Army corps will be tied down in low-intensity warfare duties, with no significant costs to Pakistan itself. At least some observers in Pakistan have argued that recent efforts to contain the jihad in

Jammu and Kashmir are merely tactical; that the military and mujaheddin are in fact allies, despite the invective they routinely direct at each other.

As the journalist Mohammad Shehzad has noted: 'On Saturday [November 15], the government on Musharraf's direction raided the offices of KI [Khuddam-ul-Islam], formerly Jaish-e-Mohammad in major cities like Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi and sealed them. *It is to be noted that the government did not arrest any worker of Jaish* [my emphasis]. The government has put JD [Jamaat-ud-Dawah, the renamed Lashkar-e-Taiba] on the watch-list. The widespread feeling in Pakistan is that such raids and sealing of offices of jihadi outfits is just a farce. Jihadis are natural allies of the establishment as they provide the establishment cheap labour to bleed India.'

Most dangerous of all, though, is the assertion by both Vajpayee and Union Defence Minister George Fernandes that the ongoing peace effort is a last throw of the dice. Unlike in, say, Nagaland, the Union government isn't talking to the principals. The APHC has no influence with the armies of the jihad and cannot give New Delhi the reduced violence it needs. Conversely, New Delhi is, on election-eve, in no position to give the APHC the sweeping concession it requires for its own fragile legitimacy to survive. Pakistan, in turn, has no real incentive to reign in terror unless it gets what it wants. Meanwhile, the Hindu right is incensed with what it sees as official pandering of Pakistani recalcitrance. Unless, there is some truly careful thinking, then, the prospects for disaster are enormous. This is after all Wonderland: each step towards peace could at once be bringing India and Pakistan closer to war.

Back to the future?

KANTI BAJPAI

HOW was the year in foreign policy? In 2003, India's concerns seemed all too familiar: Pakistan, the US and China. The prime minister's travels notwithstanding, New Delhi has no great successes to report, except in some respects with China but even here the gains were modest. I argue that relations with Pakistan and the US are more or less stagnant (notwithstanding the sexy headlines) and will remain so. A more modest course with both, which focuses on long-term gains, is no bad thing.

Relations with China and Russia are easier to handle at this point, partly because there are no great expectations or quarrels here. Given that the NDA government is looking at a general election within a year, it should pursue a quiet and sensible foreign policy with greater attention to the region, Southeast Asia, Japan and Australia.

After all the noise and banging of the drum in 2002, our relations with Pakistan are essentially limping back to a middle of the road policy that marked most of the 1990s. In 2002, after the terrorist attack on Parliament

and the Kaluchak camp, the NDA government nearly took us to war against Pakistan. (Or so National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra says.) We broke diplomatic relations with Pakistan, cut travel, threatened to end trade and break the Indus treaty, and prepared for war.

In 2003, we have spent most of our time trying to find a way out of this impossible policy. As the year closes, we seem to have achieved a way out and convinced ourselves that we have made great progress, whereas we are clawing our way back to the status quo ante!

The Pakistanis did not blink in the summer of 2002 or afterwards, and India eventually had to pull back its military formations from forward positions. New Delhi has now restored full diplomatic relations and travel, and the government has gone back to a middle of the road policy of engaging Pakistan while continuing to demand that it end its support of terrorism.

A few months ago, the government was certain that India could not talk to Pakistan until Islamabad ended

its support of terrorism. Today, there is plenty of talk going on, as there should be, and no possibility whatsoever that Pakistan is going to end its support of terror. Vajpayee will most likely go to Pakistan for the SAARC summit and meet his Pakistani counterpart, just as Indian prime ministers did three or four years ago.

As for India-US relations, there is a lot of smoke and mirrors but not much substance. Since 11 September 2001, the relationship between the two largest democracies has been up and down, in cycles, much as it was in the 1990s. Immediately after 9/11, India offered the US virtual *carte blanche* in terms of military and political co-operation. A deafening silence ensued from Washington, which caused a panic in New Delhi. A repair job was set in motion by Robert Blackwill, the new Ambassador, that saved the day. Since then there have been ups and downs: up until the summer of 2002, down after India's threat of war; up during the Kashmir elections of late 2002, and down as the Iraq war neared.

Where are we in India-US relations today? There hasn't been a US Ambassador in New Delhi for six months. The new Ambassador will be a bit of a lame duck given that the Bush Administration is coming to the end of its term. India-US relations have not been helped by the Iraq war. The Americans feel that they had a yes from India on the deployment of troops in Iraq. They are angry that New Delhi did not deliver after saying yes. They would have understood better had New Delhi said no from the beginning, but South Block's 'duplicity' has not gone down well. Paul Wolfowitz, for one, has apparently lost interest in India as have many others in the Department of Defence (DoD). Pakistan and China are increasingly back in favour with DoD. This sounds omi-

nously like the second half of the Cold War, where the US was closer to the Pakistanis and Chinese and did just enough with India to keep India from deepening its relationship to Moscow.

When President Bush came to power in 2001, he promised a brave new era with India. All said and done, nothing much has happened in real terms. There has been no presidential visit, just as in the first Clinton presidency. The US arms pipeline has still not really opened (though there has been some progress here). The resumption of military exercises and contacts between the armed forces of the two countries has brought us back to pre-1998 levels. Where we are doing better is in intelligence sharing, especially in respect of terrorism, but otherwise we are not much ahead of 1998 levels of military cooperation.

Meanwhile, there are some darkish clouds over the India-US relationship. The US has made fairly clear its view that the Indian presence in Afghanistan should be limited and sensitive to Pakistani concerns. The Americans did not find Indian 'Third World' trade unionism in Cancun amusing. And, most recently, Washington has barred Indian companies from participating in Iraq's reconstruction.

India's relations with China, ironically, have shown some daylight. The prime minister's visit was relatively successful, at least in terms of the optics. There is a sense of greater pragmatism on both sides. Both agree that trade and other relations should improve. India-China trade could easily reach \$10 billion in a couple of years. If this still seems rather puny for two such large economies, it's worth remembering that they were at a two-way trade of a mere \$200 million only eight years ago!

On the border issue with China there have been the usual rounds of the

JWG this year. There seems to be a sense in both capitals that the border negotiations have to be given some momentum. Over the past two years, India and China have exchanged some border maps, which is a step forward. We should aim to speed up these map exchanges.

The three year-old security dialogue, which brings India and China together to discuss security issues other than the border, is presumably still being held—I say presumably because there is little publicity given to the dialogue. We should ensure that this other level of security talks continue. Why not open it up to a track-two process? India and China are both part of the ASEAN Regional Forum and quite familiar with a track-two process that parallels the first track. Why not do bilaterally what we do multilaterally?

For India, the biggest gain this year with China has been Beijing's statement on Sikkim that suggests it is willing to concede India's sovereignty. This should put the Indian government in a better mood. It is unclear what the quid pro quo here is. Nevertheless, this is an important step forward. Let us see how the two countries build on it next year.

India-Russia relations are stable but not exactly soaring. The prime minister's visit to Russia was unexciting but helped consolidate an old friendship. The military aspect of the relationship is the core, and little has changed here. We still buy lots of arms from the Russians. Moscow does have something going with Pakistan, but it knows which side to come out on in a crisis. Delhi can still count on Putin for arms and diplomatic support.

What can we conclude from this brief, rather sketchy review of Indian foreign policy? First, we are not doing too well with Pakistan and the US, our two most important relation-

ships. Second, we are doing better with China and Russia. Third, there is little prospect of any dramatic changes with either Pakistan or the US. Let me say something more about the last conclusion.

With Pakistan, we must recognize that the middle path is about the only course we have and that by definition it is a slow path. It would be eccentric to try to accelerate the tempo, as we saw in Agra. And it is equally foolish to change the tempo in the opposite direction, as we tried to do in the summer of 2002 when we nearly went to war. We need a lot more preparation before we go into a summit; and war is no option.

Amiddle road with Pakistan is the only road left to us. The NDA government is now coming to the end of its life, and its focus is inevitably going to be domestic politics. Foreign policy can help somewhat in an election campaign, but not too much. So relations with Pakistan have probably gone as far as they can, and a slow middle path is about the best we can expect. This means CBMs, low-level diplomatic talks, track two diplomacy, for the most part.

In order to deal with Pakistan, we must do better in Kashmir. Over the past several years, India has followed a policy of alternation. In 1999, when nothing was working with Kashmiris, New Delhi decided to deal with Pakistan. Hence the trip to Lahore. After the Kargil war that summer, the Pakistan option was dead, and so India opened up to Kashmiris. From April to November 2000, the government tried to cultivate the Hizb: this was the season of ceasefires. When that collapsed in early 2001, we went back to Pakistan.

In April 2002, Prime Minister Vajpayee suddenly invited General Musharraf for a summit in Agra.

After the failure at Agra and the events of 9/11, we went back to dealing with Kashmiris. The Ram Jethmalani effort, the elections in Kashmir in October 2002, and the appointment of N.N. Vohra were part of a plan to do an internal deal. The announcement that Advani would lead the peace process is the latest effort to move forward in Kashmir.

Things are moving slowly in Kashmir, but it is a better bet to deal with Kashmiris than dealing with Pakistan. In the final analysis, the two parts of the problem will have to be brought together. We will have to deal with both Pakistan and Kashmiris. As things stand, it is better to work the Kashmiri side of the game. There are worrying signs – reports of a new wave of young men going across to Pakistan, and the discovery of nerve agents in bullets that the militants apparently have access to. All the more reason to try and make a difference in the Valley. If we begin to move ahead with Kashmiris, we will find Pakistan more eager to talk.

With the US, too, we must recognize that there are limits to what we can achieve. The Bush Administration is now winding down. Frankly, there are no champions of India left in the US government. The State Department was always fairly cautious. The Department of Defence is cheeched off.

In any case, all the old reasons for cultivating Pakistan and being sensitive to Islamabad's concerns came back with 9/11, and it is going to be a long time before that changes. Pakistan's location, its 'moderation' in Islamic terms, the fear that it could become less moderate, and the fact that it has nuclear weapons that could get into the wrong hands, all these have a tempering effect on how the US, Europe, Russia and even China handle Pakistan.

Notice that none of these factors has anything to do with India-Pakistan relations. Pakistan's geographic position in the world near various arcs of instability and its capacity to be a nuisance to international society are supreme strengths, ones that Pakistanis are perfectly well aware of and very astute at utilizing in their diplomacy.

New Delhi basically has three cards with Washington. The first is democracy. As the world's largest democracy in population terms, we have a political affinity with the US that is no mean resource. It is not really a strategic resource, but it always gives us something of an entrée into the US – into the public imagination, into intellectual circles, into Congress. Thirty years from now 1.5 billion Indians could be living in a mass suffrage democracy. This is a historic thing – never have so many people lived in freedom in any single society anywhere. There is a brute reality to this fact that no one can ignore.

The second card we have is the Indian-American community. This community impacts on US politics and will continue to do so. Its economic, intellectual, and professional clout keeps India 'in the game'. Finally, the Indian economy is an attraction. By the Indian economy, I don't just mean our markets and GNP. I also mean our technical and technological potential. One and a half billion people constitute a huge amount of brain power.

These 'cards' can't really be played the way Pakistan plays its cards. These are 'calling cards' more than playing cards – to be filed away, as it were. We have to continue to play for the long term with the Americans. Slowly but surely is the way to do it. A strategic relationship can't be built in a day, and it cannot probably be built

in the way that some think it can, namely, by being a close military ally of the US. Not sending troops to Iraq was probably wise (given the complexity of the situation there and the strains on our own manpower), and it's not the way of the foreseeable future.

One of the most important things to do is to build links with people in the US outside the government. This has been said many times, but it is worth repeating: India must have better relations with US think tanks, universities, the media, and non governmental organizations. How to do this is a challenging task given that every country in the world is vying for the attention of these institutions and actors. But surely being more lenient with visas and encouraging Indian groups to develop links with US counterparts is crucial. One of our biggest advantages is the openness of our society; but we often behave with Americans as if we are afraid of our openness. Sixty years after independence, I think we can handle a few dozen American intellectuals coming to India!

What should be an agenda for next year? I think there is not much happening in India-Pakistan or India-US relations. The relationship with China is quietly blooming. We must continue to work at the border issue and encourage trade. We must also build on China's own fears of Pakistani extremism. Before 1998, India had quite successfully brought Beijing round to a more even-handed approach towards South Asia. It should be our goal to do so again. The Chinese, for their part, have signalled their interest in doing exactly this. I think that New Delhi has to begin to prepare the Indian public for a border settlement with China. This requires, at least as a start, that the government

in power keep the major opposition parties informed of its thinking on China and a possible settlement.

Our own region is a troubling zone, and we need to pay it greater attention. For five years now, the NDA government has basically kept its attention focused on Pakistan, the US and China, and everything else has receded. This is dangerous because domestic turmoil in these countries could impinge on us quite seriously.

Another important region is Southeast Asia. The early to mid 1990s saw us open up to this region. A decade later, the Look East policy looks rather sad. Our interests here are more economic than anything else. Yet we have done little to give an economic engagement much life. Farther afield, relations with Japan have never developed the zing they should have. The Japanese are to blame for some of this, but so are we.

Australia, too, is an important country for us. The Australians manage to rub us the wrong way more often than even the Americans (I don't think we understand Aussie ways), but there are common interests. The Indian view that the Australians are American stooges is not very helpful. What we can do with Australia is really the question. In the Indian Ocean and elsewhere, we can begin to do things. The fact that we are both parliamentary democracies makes Australia a natural ally in Asia.

This is not a particularly glamorous agenda. In an election year, you shouldn't be too glamorous. Keep lines of communication open with everyone including the Pakistanis and Americans, but don't expect too much. Do some quiet, sensible things elsewhere. Make sure your domestic politics are stable and democratic. And, as they say, keep your head down and your powder dry.

In conversation

Sunderlal Bahuguna with George James

GAJ: Sunderlalji, we have been speaking about the proposed project of interlinking the water sources in India. You have suggested a number of alternatives to this strategy – restraint in water use, alternatives to water intensive crops, and afforestation. Could you say a little more about the need for austerity in the use of water?

SB: Austerity is needed not only in agriculture but also in industry. Industries make intensive use of water and pollute water as well.

GAJ: It's my understanding that the water of the Yamuna that departs from Delhi contains 3000 times more coliform organisms per 100 ml than the water that enters the city.

SB: It is for the sake of Delhi that this dam [the Tehri Dam] is being constructed. Water is being diverted to Delhi. I ask our rulers, 'What have you done to the Yamuna? You have polluted the Yamuna and now you want the Ganges water to wash off your sins in Delhi [laughs].' So the third thing is afforestation, tree farming. The central vision behind it is that the population is increasing and the land is degrading. So you have to get more production from less land. The only way out is tree farming.

GAJ: It is my understanding that tree farming has been undertaken in India, with crops of eucalyptus.

SB: No, no, no, that is foolishness! The first priority should be trees with big canopies and broad leaves because they give more oxygen and absorb more carbon dioxide. Today our lifestyle is very different. We do not think about oxygen. Our first priority should be oxygen and the absorption of carbon dioxide. And the conservation of water depends on the tree species. Eucalyptus grows very high but does not have a dense canopy and its root system is such that the water goes down. Eucalyptus transpires too much water from the soil. I remember Richard St. Barbe Baker, the man of the trees. When he was travelling with me he stopped the car and asked who planted this foolish tree. Then

he told me, 'Trees should have more capacity to absorb water and not only conserve water but also purify water.' So trees should give more oxygen, and absorb more carbon dioxide. They should conserve more water and purify the water. The oak tree here is regarded as very useful because it both conserves and purifies the water. All of our water sources are in the oak forests. Then comes food, trees giving food, giving fodder, and giving fiber. That means making communities self-sufficient in all their basic needs. That is the real economy.

GAJ: By a real economy you mean a local economy in which the people actually live from the land they live on, rather than what you have called a money order economy, where young people go away to work and send money home.

SB: Yes, people sitting here get money from the outside. And how do they use that money? They use that money for meeting their basic needs.

GAJ: You have also spoken of these things in terms of religion. You have spoken of the sacredness of trees, and the sacredness of water. I read recently that you were quoted as saying that the Hindus give water to their dead while the Muslim Emperor Aurangzeb refused water to his dying father.

SB: Shahjahan, his father, said that.

GAJ: Please explain.

SB: Aurangzeb had put his father in prison. Later his father, Shahjahan whom he had put in jail, sent this to him: [Sunderlal quotes from the Urdu source and translates]. 'The Hindus are praiseworthy. They give water to their dead. Oh Muslim! Are you so cruel that you cannot give water to your own father in jail?'

GAJ: I think the source I read must have misquoted you.

SB: You know there is a saying: the devil quotes the Bible. The real spirituality is to see life in all living beings, to see life in trees, in rivers, in mountains.

That would be an ideal society. Today what we are doing is getting all of our things from far away. So this society is harming other beings for the sake of human beings. We have destroyed the habitat of the birds; we have destroyed the habitat of the fish. We have destroyed the habitat of other species. Man has been given the advantage of heart and hand in order to protect other species, but now he is using these in order to finish all other species. See how poor we are compared to our ancestors whom we call primitive. Today we have constructed big cities, a large network of railways, and so many other things. But in the process so many species have become extinct for the sake of and the pleasure of human beings. Those who are the protectors have become the destroyers of other species. So I believe in the moral duty of human beings.

GAJ: Do you see that duty as related to the Hindu religious tradition?

SB: There is an idea in Hindu dharma, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, ‘This whole earth is my family.’ It is what Gandhi tried to translate into secular life. He never said that the British were our enemy. He said I am doing this for the benefit of all. And because we have lived together for so many years I also want to bring benefit to the British people. So he was working for all human kind. He was not a nationalistic man. He didn’t even think that he should only do everything for India. He said, ‘I am working for India so that all other nations can benefit. And all others should be free.’

In his prayers he chanted eleven vows of life: *ahimsa* (non-violence); *satya* (truth); *asteya* (not to take another’s things; not to steal); *brahmacharya* (celibacy); *ashangra* (not to collect too many things); *shram* (bodily labour); *asvada* (not to hanker after taste, the taste of the tongue); *abhaya* (not to be afraid of anybody and not to make anybody afraid); *samanalok* (the belief that all religions are equal). Gandhi included in his prayers, the prayers from all religions. Then *swadeshi* (self-reliance), and *sparshabhavana* (not to practice untouchability). These are the eleven vows of life. We have to apply these eleven vows, these eleven disciplines of life. What I have tried to do is to carry on Gandhi’s work after independence. Gandhi was the first leader of the world who didn’t join the government after the country became independent. Did you know this?

GAJ: In fact he thought that Congress should be disbanded after independence.

SB: Yes, in his last message on 29 January 1948, the day before he was assassinated, he wrote that the Congress

should be dissolved. As soon as they heard that Gandhi had made this demand, Nehru and Patel went to see him. They must have wondered what the old man was up to. And they told him, ‘Bapu we hear that you have suggested that the Congress should be dissolved.’ Gandhi said, ‘Yes. It is right, because the Congress is at its height of glory, and if it survives it will be misused. So it should be finished.’

GAJ: And obviously they disagreed with him, and they went their way and...

SB: The other thing they asked was, ‘What will you do with the first class leaders?’ Gandhi said that the *swaraj*, the independence of his dreams, had not yet come. ‘As swaraj, I want a system in which every village is independent. So I want first class leaders in order to implement this idea. These first class leaders are trained to educate the masses. So I will tell them that each one should live in a village, and train people for that, to bring the real fruits of swaraj to the people.’

You know, Gandhi wanted to make every village self-sufficient in basic needs. And as I said earlier, I’ve tried to continue the work of Gandhi. So I thought that the first basic need is oxygen, then water, the third is food, then shelter and clothing. They need such big dams to supply water. Why not every village, every town, be self-sufficient in water? Why should they displace so many people for getting water? So you see what I have been trying is to implement Gandhi’s ideas in post-independent India.

GAJ: But now, when we look at this setting overlooking the river that has now been dammed, and we see the resignation of the people and the devastation of the town itself, are you discouraged?

SB: No, no, I am not discouraged because I think that good sense will prevail. Remember there is one belief in our country; Truth will triumph in the end. This is the basic truth. I would like to ask them: what will you do when this dam is silted up? Will you tell the cane growers that you must cultivate coarse grain now because there is no more water, the dam is over (laughs)? A river is a full ecosystem; it is not only the water. There is all this topsoil being manufactured in the Himalayas and distributed by the river all over the country. Then there is fish life. It is the folly of human beings that they disturb other life, even the home of the fish. What will you do if somebody threatens to destroy your house? You would become furious, but the fish will become extinct.

GAJ: Hinduism tells us that we are living in the Kali Yuga, the dark age, where evil seems to prevail over good. In the present world that doctrine has much support. How can you believe that truth will prevail in the end?

SB: You know, when there is darkness everywhere, even a single, small lamp that is lit somewhere far, far away, becomes the lamp of hope for those who are groping in the dark. So if you are far away and in the dark but you see a lamp you will go towards it.

GAJ: I've been very interested in the way you combine science and religion, particularly the Hindu religious tradition. I understand that recently you were in the Western Ghats, visiting Pandurang Hegde and his campaign to save the Kali river. One of the strategies of that campaign has been the padyatra. It's my understanding that the padyatra is not just a walk in the woods, but that it has a religious history as well.

SB: You know, after all, you have to meet the people. When you are in a vehicle you are in a hurry. And you cannot stop the vehicle at every point where you meet people. When you are walking even if you meet a single person you will talk to him. It means that the padyatra is the best method to convey the message. It has been so from ancient times. Jesus had no car.

GAJ: I guess he was a practitioner of the padyatra that most Christians don't recognize. He told his disciples to walk from place to place, to carry no goods, to eat what is put before them, to heal, and to teach.

SB: He is still reigning over our hearts on account of that padyatra. Because that padyatra is living. You know today the radio and television and so many other things are barking, but there is no impact. It is only a fleeting pleasure, a barking faith. But when you meet somebody you talk to him.

GAJ: To go back to the padyatra with Pandurang Hegde, the founder of the Appiko movement in Karnataka; how did you come to know him?

SB: Pandurang Hegde was a student of Social Work at Delhi University. And there is a requirement in Social Work that you have to do some fieldwork with some old social worker. So he came to my ashram in Silyara. After he was there for some time I asked, 'Pandurang, what are you going to do after this?' He replied, 'I will do some service.' After he went back, one day he wrote to me. 'Please come here. I am going to start some work in Karnataka to save the Western Ghats.' And then he

launched the Appiko movement. Appiko is the word for Chipko in Kannada.

GAJ: It is my understanding that the padyatra is a very old religious tradition.

SB: You know, as a matter of fact, religions have become too narrow. But the real thing is spirituality. It means seeing the almighty in all beings, not only in human beings but also in birds, beasts, trees, mountains, rivers. That is spirituality. I have tried to marry spirituality and science. As Vinobha Bhave said, science plus spirituality is *sarvodaya*, the good for all. But science plus politics is equal to the atom bomb. When science is in the hands of politics then it is a disaster. I have tried to convince people that the main produce of the forests is soil, water, and pure air, not timber, resin and foreign exchange.

Our relationship to nature should be that of a child to the mother. Nature is our mother and we are the children. We should not go far away from nature. We should have a simple lifestyle. That is what Gandhi understood. And in a way E.F. Schumacher interpreted these ideas for the rest of the world when he said, 'Small is Beautiful.' But people do not understand that big is horrible. That is the other thing. In order to maintain big things you have to do injury to nature, you have to use other nations and underdeveloped areas. And what the rich countries have done is that they have made foreign exchange the God of the poor countries.

GAJ: This analogy between consumerism and religion is an interesting one. In some of your writings you've made the point that there is a new religion. And the leaders of Third World countries are eager to bring the god of that religion into their midst.

SB: The religion of economics.

GAJ: I think this is more than an analogy because in a religion that is integrated within a society, the people don't think of it as a religion. It is taken for granted. In America modern economics is taken for granted. It's not something they are aware of as being alien from themselves.

SB: Now many people think that Gandhi will come from the West. The wise people in the West will realize that they should do away with this consumerism and its theory of nature. Then people in other nations will also realize this.

GAJ: Another aspect of this consumerist worldview is that the wealth that westerners have accumulated does not seem to make them happy.

SB: Yes, material wealth does not make men happy. It only makes them greedy, to find satisfaction in more and more material things. You know the ultimate objective of life should be the achievement of happiness, peace and fulfillment, whereas the materialist society believes in temporary happiness, temporary peace, and temporary satisfaction. This is the basic difference between the two: materialism and the philosophy of Gandhi. We have to redefine development. Development is a state in which the individuals in society enjoy permanent peace, happiness and fulfillment. Whatever we have achieved today is by converting nature into cash. So we have to redefine our civilization. Those who employ the economic theory of nature are regarded as civilized. But those who live in perfect harmony with nature, who do no harm to nature, really they are the civilized persons.

GAJ: When you speak of economics as a religion, I take it that you see analogies in materialism for various aspects of religion. You have said, for instance, that you see the dollar as a new god, and the technicians and the bureaucrats as a new priesthood.

SB: They are all, politicians, technocrats, and bureaucrats. They all join to bring that god to the people, and allure the people to believe that their well-being depends on this god.

GAJ: And the temples of this religion? What is the analogy for the temples of this religion?

SB: The temples are these projects. Nehru started this thinking. He said they were the new temples of India. This is the basic difference between Gandhi and Nehru. Nehru was very impressed by Soviet Russia and by the development in the West, whereas Gandhi's thinking was quite different. He believed in a decent life system, in a decent life society, in which power resided in these villages. He wanted to make it just like this. [Sunderlal takes a sheet of paper, folds it in half, and places it in front of him with the fold facing up.] This is a triangle. The base is here. So the base is wider. And the top is narrow. He wanted that all power should be at the base. And as you move up the triangle the power should go on decreasing. And in the end (at the top) there is very little power—only foreign affairs, defence, external affairs and so on. He believed in participatory democracy. Gandhi's concept of democracy was direct participation of the people. The concept of other leaders was quite different because they were power hungry. They wanted power. And that could only be possible in a centralized system.

GAJ: So now we have an inverted triangle? The local people are without power, while the central government has enormous power?

SB: People have become like paupers. Whenever a government leader or minister visits the village they all come with their demands. 'Please give us something.' In a decent life system they should have direct control over the government, and all their problems should have been solved. So it is due to this centralized system in a poor country that we are under the debt we have. We incur debt for our development from other countries. When we achieved freedom, England was our debtor. Now we are indebted even to the smallest countries of the world.

GAJ: You have spoken earlier about a permanent economy, as opposed to a temporary economy. It's my understanding that scientific studies of dams like this one reveal that they will eventually silt up. The developers have claimed that this dam will last a hundred years.

SB: Yes, but experts on Himalayan geology say that it will silt up in 30 years because the siltation rate in this river is very high. The other thing is that the measurements for water siltation they are using were taken in 1949 when they envisaged this dam. Today the water flow is only half of what it was. I was born in this area and have been seeing this river since then. Before it went under this temporary lake, you could see high water marks of previous times, and you could see that the river was very high and now it is low. I am also afraid that the dam will be constructed but it will not be finished, meaning that there will not be enough water to fill it. Water, as you know, is going to be an international problem, especially in the Asian countries, due to rise in temperatures, the dwindling of water sources, and the disappearance of glaciers.

GAJ: An alternative to building a huge dam that will silt up is a technology called run of the river. Does any project in India use the run of the river technology?

SB: Yes, yes. On this very river, beyond Uttarkashi there are two such projects. You know, in the run of the river scheme, you just take a channel from the river. And after a few kilometres you can make a fall and generate electricity.

My plan emerged after the Chipko movement. In the Chipko movement we had to fight for eight years to make the truth known to the government that the main product of the Himalayan forests is not timber but water. The slogan of the Chipko movement was, 'What

does the forest bear? Soil, water, and pure air!' While their [the government's] slogan was, 'What does the forest bear? Resin, timber and foreign exchange.' Our plan was to convince the people that their well-being lies in planting trees. So I identified the trees, especially of the Himalayan region. The first priority is to trees giving nuts, like walnuts. Second, to trees giving edible seeds, like almond. There is a variety of wild apricot whose seeds are sweet like almond. That too can be grown here. The third priority is to trees giving oil seeds. The fourth for flowering trees, for honey. There is one tree, the bald cherry, that flowers in the month of November and December and is regarded as a divine tree in the Himalaya. When there is nothing for the bees this tree provides nectar. So flowering trees. And last, seasonal fruit. And this classification depends upon the survival period of the products. Nuts, edible seeds, oil seeds, flowering trees for honey, and last seasonal fruits. Because the survival period for seasonal fruits is too short.

Modern civilization has made man the butcher of nature. We kill nature and become prosperous. But that is temporary economics. So I raise the question, how long will this dam work? It is temporary. But if they plant the whole Himalaya with trees, the water renewing capacity of Himalaya will increase. And that will be permanent. It will make the hill people prosperous also. Today what has happened to the hills by felling the trees is that there are landslides and the soil, which is the flesh and blood of the mountains, is flowing down to the sea. And do you know that there is an ecological rule that men follow their soil. The people are going down to the plains.

GAJ: This ties in to what you said earlier about the money order economy, that people go down to the plains to get jobs.

SB: It's like attempting to catch the soil; but the soil is gone. So they are there and their people are here waiting for the money order to come.

GAJ: We hear a lot in the media about globalization. Where there are cheap labour resources, that labour can be exploited electronically, on a global scale. People are working at an extraordinary distance from the land they occupy. I'm wondering if you see globalization as completely negative, or whether globalization can be accommodated in some way to support a local economy.

SB: I will tell you a very remarkable slogan: 'Think globally and act locally.' In your actions you should

think about the whole world, about the well-being of all. But actions should be local, production should be local. And I do not believe in so much foreign trade. People should be self-sufficient from their own resources. You know Gandhi was a deep thinker. The first book he wrote was *Hind Swaraj*, in 1907. So today the question is man's relationship with nature and with other species. This is the first thing. It is the test of our civilization. Because we say that we have become civilized. But I would argue that we are like tigers in a cage, getting our sustenance from far away, and impoverishing others, the weaker people, alluring them with foreign exchange. And as I told you, for the governments of poorer countries the dollar has become next to God.

GAJ: I've heard some people suggest ways of renovating globalization, of adjusting it, so that local people will receive more from the raw materials they are loosing.

SB: You know there is a class of middlemen, traders. In some cases the government is the middleman. The middlemen do nothing for the benefit of the local people, although they always get the biggest share. Under the motive of profit they will grow too much. And too much production is like squeezing out the last pound of flesh from our body. In a natural system there is a harmonious relationship between human beings, animals, plants and so on. But that harmonious relationship is destroyed by this centralized system of production, and by money economics. And money becomes next to God. In order to bring that god to their home they will sell everything. The exploitation of oil resources by the Arab sheiks in the Middle East is an example. Any system that is based on non-renewable resources is temporary. The essence of Gandhian philosophy is that your life should depend upon renewable resources, which you get from your surroundings.

You know that is why that old man [Gandhi] used to peddle a bicycle. In the production of energy, the first priority should be human energy. You can improve the machines, make them more efficient. With less energy you can get more. The second priority should be animal energy. Not animals for eating! Third is biogas from human and animal waste. Fourth is solar energy, where there is enough sun. Fifth is wind. Sixth is geothermal energy. And the seventh is hydroelectric power from the run of the river. These should be our energy priorities in a non-violent and permanent society. Today we are doing violence towards the earth, toward nature. We have become butchers of nature.

From home to estate

DUNU ROY

THE year was 1981 and the Municipal Corporation was planning to evict pavement dwellers from the streets of downtown Bombay. At this time, a disturbed journalist filed one of the first 'public interest' petitions to protect the rights of pavement dwellers. In 1986, the court gave a landmark judgement in what came to be known as the Olga Tellis case, holding that the Right to Life included the Right to Livelihood and, hence, the pavement dwellers could not be arbitrarily evicted as their livelihood was dependent on where they lived.

It was in this same city that the Slum Clearance Act had been passed in the early '70s, and the Slum Upgradation Scheme was conceptualised in the '80s, later becoming the Slum Redevelopment Scheme of the '90s. And it was in the very same metropolis that, at the turn of the century, the government moved with massive force, with helicopters and armed police, to evict 73,000 families from

the periphery of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. Curiously enough, this action was in response to court orders in another 'public interest' petition, but this time filed by the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG).

What the BEAG appeared to be concerned about was the protection of a 28 square kilometre 'National' Park, particularly the one-third reserved for 'tourism'. But no one seemed to be bothered by either the sundry religious ashrams inside the park or the proliferating blocks of private apartment houses on its boundary. What then was common to the nature of 'public interest' espoused by Tellis and the BEAG, and how did the court view either or both? And were there any radical social changes in the 20 years that intervened between the two?

The first petition, what would subsequently come to be known as Public Interest Litigation (PIL), was filed in the Supreme Court of India in 1979 on the issue of the violation of

fundamental rights of undertrials in prisons. An advocate filed a *habeas corpus* petition under Article 32 of the Constitution (Right to move the court for enforcement of fundamental rights) on the basis of newspaper reports describing how these undertrial prisoners had already been imprisoned for longer than the maximum sentence that could be imposed upon conviction. For the first time the court had to adjudicate in a matter where the affected party was not directly approaching it for redress.

Seeking to overcome the hurdles imposed by traditional jurisprudence, the court gave a landmark judgement touching upon several such cases before it. It stated: 'Where the weaker sections of the community are concerned, such as undertrial prisoners languishing in jails without trial, inmates of the protective home in Agra, or harijan (Untouchable caste) workers engaged in road construction in the district of Ajmer, who are living in poverty and destitution, who are barely eking out a miserable existence with their sweat and toil, who are helpless victims of an exploitative society and who do not have easy access to justice, the Supreme Court will not insist on a regular writ petition to be filed by the public-spirited individual espousing their cause and seeking relief for them.' But, unlike Tellis, the BEAG was clearly not espousing the cause of 'helpless victims of an exploitative society.' Thus, it appears that in two decades, the notion of the 'public interest' had dramatically changed, as had the notion of a 'planned' city.

This phenomenon does not appear to be peculiar to the Congress and Shiv Sena's *mahanagar* of Mumbai. In Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's Chennai, where 40% of the population is reported to be living in slums – as compared to Mumbai's 55% – there

are 69,000 families who have been identified as living on government land and they are to be relocated to areas far removed from the city. The areas they will vacate will be taken over by railway tracks, hotel resorts, commercial and residential complexes and modern businesses. Much of the 'clearance' is being undertaken in the name of 'beautification' and tourism.

The same notions of 'environmental improvement' prevail in Left Front-governed Kolkata where Operation Sunshine was launched in 1996 to evict over 50,000 hawkers from the city's main streets. Currently over 7,000 hutments are being forcibly demolished along the sides of storm-water drains and the Metro and Circular rail tracks. Rumours are rife that boats full of tourists will ply on the restored Tolly's Nala. At the same time, lavish commercial and residential complexes are coming up unhampered along the Metropolitan Bypass, where real estate prices rival those in the elite areas of South Calcutta.

And the Congress-ruled state of Delhi, where sub-standard settlements house as many as 70% of the city's population, leads the way in environmental activism. Not only have vendors, cycle-rickshaws, beggars, shanties, polluting and non-conforming industries, and diesel buses already been 'evicted', but also next on the hit-list are those 75,000 families who live along the Yamuna's banks and are held responsible for the river's pollution.

Smaller cities, where 15-20% of the people live in slums, are in the grip of the same malaise. Hyderabad was distributing land titles and housing loans to the urban poor in 1977 but the Telugu Desam Party is now merrily leasing large tracts of land at heavily subsidised prices to business groups, international airports, cinema halls,

shopping complexes, hotels, corporate hospitals, and railway tracks. Over 10,000 houses of the 'weaker sections' have been demolished to make way for the new face of 'Cyberabad'. Bangalore under the Indian National Congress is in keen competition as it upscales to accommodate lounges and pubs, parks and apartment complexes, malls and layouts, 'clean' industry and 'green' business.

The court has even begun to intervene in the debate on whether flyovers are superior to underpasses. Ahmedabad is not far behind with its 'slum upgradation' scheme complementing architecturally bizarre housing blocks. But the Bharatiya Janata Party has been innovative in using communal frenzy as a means of evicting large sections of the 'unwanted'. Chandigarh first displaced almost 40 villages when it was built; then it displaced the labour camps that housed those who originally built the city. Now the administration (first under the Akalis and then with the Congress at the helm) is once again 'beautifying' the environs by evicting the service class that inhabits the occasional slum.

Under the Ganga Action Plan, not only is Varanasi's sewerage being 'improved' (although the Ganga remains as polluted as before), but sections of the immigrant population are being selectively targeted for removal in order to 'protect heritage'. It has made no difference as to who has been ruling the state. Indore, till recently presided over by the Congress, has already seen the negligible impact of slum upgradation under an award-winning Rs 65 crore Habitat Improvement Project, and now the same upgradation is being scrapped in the name of riverfront development.

Three trends become apparent when we look at this recent history of urban reform. First, large sections of

the urban poor are being displaced from spaces that they have occupied for many years by governments, regardless of political affiliations. These sections are often the ones who have been employed in the informal sector or are self-employed in the tertiary services sector. Their displacement has as much to do with the space they live in as with the work that they perform, and has been promoted by bilateral and multilateral funding agencies.

Second, the geographical and occupational space that they occupied is being transferred to larger private corporate entities or wealthier groups, for commercial complexes and residential layouts. These units are also often coupled with labour-replacing devices ranging from automatic tellers and computer-aided machines to vacuum cleaners and home delivery services, thus taking over the work earlier done by the lower rungs of the urban population.

Third, while the driving force behind these changes is manifestly the new globalised economy, it is offered on an environmental platter of 'cleanliness' and 'beautification'. This environmental activism, in turn, is the bread and butter of those professional 'non-government organisations' (NGO) that are taking up the 'public cause', as well as the judicial, legislative, administrative and commercial apparatuses – including a very amenable media – that provide them with legitimacy and political support.

In vicious combination these three trends are transforming the urban landscape from the city as 'home' to the city as 'estate'. Concepts of urban planning too are changing in harmony with these trends although, as we shall see later, the seeds were sown much earlier as capitalist empire spread its hegemony over the world.

The attack on work coincided with India falling into the trap of structural adjustment laid by the global multilateral funding institutions in the early '90s. It is thus revealing how decisions taken in one part of society affect another. It was in 1985 that an NGO filed a 'public interest' petition in the Supreme Court against the limestone mines in the Mussoorie hills, arguing that they were devastating the Himalayan ecology as well as despoiling the air of the valley below. After a series of hearings and investigations, the court eventually ordered the closure of the mines on the grounds that the Right to Clean Environment flowed from Article 21 of the Constitution (Right to Life).

However, when the workers in the mines protested that they would be deprived of the Right to Livelihood – as interpreted by the court in the Tellis case – their appeal was rejected. The court held that the Right to Clean Environment was 'superior' to the Right to Livelihood. In this manner, of two children emanating from the same parent, the highest court in the land held that one was more important.

In the last 15 years the same line of 'environmental' reasoning has been used by various vested interest groups who have urged the courts to demolish the livelihoods of many million ordinary working people. 'Violations' of the 'Master' plans have been used as the pretext for penalising the poor in almost all the urban conglomerates. Much of this has happened in Delhi – as befits the capital city of a 'resurgent' India, being led by a Presidential rocket scientist into the new millennium. Since 1995, when the first 'green' judgements were handed down, the judges have led the charge against the urban working class.

The attack on urban shelter began much earlier, sometimes in the

'60s, when large-scale evictions took place as the first master plans came into being. The climax was reached during the late '70s when the declaration of a National Emergency suspended all human rights and the administration had a free hand to demolish and recast as they pleased. It is also important to note that the era of 'public interest' litigation followed the Emergency, as the court genuflected before mass discontent and restored many of the civil liberties, particularly of the poor.

But the wheel has come full circle. There are at least a dozen judicial orders that have now ordained that slum dwellers have limited rights to what is being euphemistically called 'free' shelter. Administrative concern can be assessed by the fact that, on Independence Day in 2001, the poetic prime minister announced his government's intention to provide every urban poor family with a house to live in by 2010. Six weeks later, on World Habitat Day, the Union Cabinet cleared the Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana with a munificent grant of Rs 2000 crore for the period of the next Five-Year Plan. Next, the Union Minister for Urban Development declared that four lakh houses would be built every year by public sector institutions for the urban poor.

However, spread over 5161 towns and cities, and at the rate of Rs 50,000 per house, the number of houses built would average out to 15.5 per urban centre! So the Group of Ministers arbitrarily revised the target to 20 lakh houses per year. Real estate developers, on the other hand, estimate that for a family to acquire a one-room kitchen tenement, situated in the distant suburbs of metro cities, would cost a minimum of Rs 2 lakh. The monthly instalment for a 15-year loan would be Rs 1860, or roughly 75% of

the average monthly income of a slum dweller!

The events cited above, therefore, give rise to several questions about the nature of 'planning' itself. Who makes these plans, and who are they made for? Do the planners take into account actual data from the study of how cities grow, or do they make constructs from what they think cities should be like? Where does reality end, and where does imagination begin? What are the basic theories of urban planning, do they differ from each other, and how have they changed over time?

Is it true that city planners only 'plan' cities, they do not 'make' them? Do cities have their own organic logic of growth, with different interests competing with each other to make the city the way they want it to be for their own survival? Should more planners begin to understand this, so that they will be able to plan for the city as it is actually growing, rather than for an idealised notion of what the city should be? And if planners fail to see this central truth will they eventually end up catering only to the needs of those whose interests are most powerful?

Perhaps, in order to answer these and many related questions, it would be instructive to explore the history of Delhi, a settlement with over 10 centuries of recorded experience in the construction of urban conurbations. Delhi has also been the site for multiple conquests and regimes, the nerve centre of political and administrative power, and the source of ideas and wealth. It is also the area where the Pandavas possibly built their Indraprastha on the banks of the Yamuna. The architect of this capital, the first city planner, was appropriately enough, a 'demon' named *Maya*, or 'illusion'.

The other settlements that have left their imprint on the territory of Dilli are the forts of Qila Lal Kot (1024 AD) built by Anangpal, and Qila Rai Pithora (1170 AD) of Prithviraj Chauhan. Qutb-ud-din Aibak built his citadel and the Qutb Minar in the same area in 1199. All these cities were built on the *Kohi* (hilly) area in the south where the northern end of the long Aravali ridge intrudes into the Gangetic plain as a series of rocky outcrops. Thus, the town planner of that time was obviously locating for defence and commerce, as well as looking for sources of water which could be entrapped.

It was in 1302 that Ala-ud-din Khilji cautiously descended from the *Kohi* into the more fertile basin to the north and built a new capital at Siri. But for the water supply to his new city his engineers had to also construct the imaginative Hauz Khas on one of the many streams leading into the Yamuna. This city was plagued by problems of defence, because in 1320 Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq moved back south on to the *Kohi* and built Tughluqabad with its massive fortifications. However, the Tughluqs had to abandon this fort within five years because of a shortage of water, and Muhammad Shah Tughluq moved back to the lowlands and built the city of Shahjahanabad in 1534.

His son, Firoz Shah Tughluq, conceived of the idea of diverting the water of the Yamuna into an old bed of the river and bringing it all the way south, irrigating prime agricultural land and adding considerably to the revenues of the state. In a way, this was an environmental enterprise because the canal was constructed as a drought relief measure. It was perhaps in order to be closer to this productive venture that his planners created Firozabad in the north in a wedge between the river

on the east and the last of the Aravali ridge on the west.

In 1530, Humayun, the second of the Moghuls, built his Deenpanah on top of a mound immediately south of Firozabad where the river provided a first line of defence and water was available in wells. The Afghan King, Sher Shah Suri, settled his Dilli next to this fort in 1542. Shahjahan moved further north into the apex of the wedge to build Shahjahanabad between 1638-44 with the Lal Qila, or Red Fort, as its fulcrum and a ring of satellite forts at Tihār, Palam, and Patparganj to protect the trade routes.

The planners designed a series of tanks and wells to ensure a dependable supply of water, and extended the old Tughluq canal all the way into the heart of the city at Chandni Chowk. The necessities of defence, trade, revenue and water kept all these cities located within the strategic basin to the east of the Ridge. They involved elaborate layouts and considerable engineering but we do not know enough about the principles of city planning in that period. However, it is known that Shahjahan built Shahjahanabad because the residents of the older capital, Agra, would not let him broaden the streets there for his processions.

A study of the layouts of Lal Kot, Siri, Tughluqabad and Shahjahanabad shows that this grand processional way, with the royal palace at one end and a significant landmark (like a place of worship or a *hauz*) at the other, was the principal feature of all these cities. This, then, was the designed *formal* city of the upper classes, and it was surrounded by the flexible *informal* settlements containing *bazaars* and *katras*, *dharamshalas* and *hamams*, *akhadas* and *makhtabs*. The city's elite officially controlled these informal settlements but what really char-

acterised them was that they were allowed to grow organically with formal protection being granted to those working classes who produced for, transported and served the elite.

By the end of the 18th century the East India Company had begun making deep inroads into the territories of Mughal India. This necessitated military planning and construction of barracks and Company quarters near and within every large town, including Shahjahanabad. The confluence of the newly commissioned Grand Trunk road and Bombay-Agra road made Delhi a place of strategic importance.

The aftermath of the revolt of 1857 led to further enforcement of armed control and the area around the Red Fort was completely cleared to enable the military to assert its supremacy. Several of the *katras* and bazaars were razed to the ground and there was even a proposal to blow up the entire walled city. Fortunately, a shortage of gunpowder made that impossible, but the shortage of housing forced the European and British civil servants to move out of Shahjahanabad. Civil administration was now centred around the Secretariat built next to the northern ridge within the safe confines of the Civil Lines. The new Viceregal Lodge with its protective barracks was built at an even safer distance across the ridge.

Thus, the military and commercial imperatives of colonial rule began to refashion the rules of town planning. This was reflected in the formation of the Municipal Committee in 1863, which proposed construction of a commercial square outside Lahori Gate, continuing into a new commercial quarter between the Gate and Sadar Bazar. These were supposed to be profitable enterprises in the tradition of the East India Company. The close of the century also saw the intru-

sion of the railway line as it thrust through and demolished the ramparts of the Red Fort and Shahjahanabad.

This new mode of transport not only displaced the old trade routes and their *sarais*, but also marked a radical break from the previous concepts of town planning. Thus, the railways continued their expansion in the beginning of the 20th century and, in the process, the new planners pulled down the bastions of the Walled City and filled the city's protective ditches and canals. In a curious anticipation of modern practice, much of this was justified in the name of 'cleanliness' and 'fresh air'!

The Delhi Sadar station was constructed between the old town and Sadar Bazar, disrupting the organic linkage between the two, while a mercantile boulevard was proposed between the Kabul and Ajmer Gates. A second city began rapidly growing in Paharganj, Sadar Bazar and Sabzi Mandi across the railway tracks. This led to the appointment in 1908 of an Assistant Commissioner as Officer on Special Duty to 'plan the future expansion of Delhi on an orderly basis.' This officer promptly recommended the westward expansion of the city across the ridge and the 'improvement' of the older areas.

By 1912, the dream of an imperial city at Delhi was being transformed into reality and a Town Planning Committee was appointed for the purpose. This committee continued to adopt the same military and commercial objectives of the early colonisers. One founding principle of such a view was that not only had the 'new' to be constructed afresh, but the 'old' had also to be demolished. This was predicated on the argument that if the old were allowed to survive it would pose a threat to the new order. Hence, while earlier rulers had moved coordinates and built new cities, the British pro-

posed to build the new on the ruins of the old itself. This laid down the fundamental premise of all 'planned' eviction and displacement.

This committee oversaw the acquisition of extensive areas in the southern basin for the construction of New Delhi. The architects Baker and Lutyens located the new Viceregal palace on the imposing height of Raisina hill with the new city spread out at its feet. The processional avenue of King's Way (now Rajpath) from the Palace (Rashtrapati Bhavan) to India Gate followed the vision of the older formal city. But the space alongside was not allotted to shops, residences and temples in the manner of Chandni Chowk. The move further outwards, what would have been the informal settlement in earlier times, was also formally planned with a strict sense of military hierarchy. Connaught Place was given over to commercial enterprise. Huge acreage was laid aside for the bureaucracy and ruling elite with spacious avenues and parks dominating the landscape. Scrub forests and agricultural farms were cleared to make a series of bungalows in descending order of size according to the rank of the occupant. Even the size of the family to potentially occupy the servants quarters was specified!

With their passion for measurement and 'science', the new rulers ensured that *everything* was in its 'proper' place. In the process, the roads cut in straight lines across the city as if on parade. Revenue was codified as if the rains would arrive on time, the crops grow at regular intervals, and markets function according to the rules of Empire. Much of the earlier drainage pattern, which had taken the run-off from the Aravalis to the tombs and gardens of the earlier rulers, was destroyed to make way for a new regime of stormwater drains.

The committee also assigned the Western Extension Area (WEA) for expansion, particularly for settling the 'poorer classes'. It decided to completely demolish the remaining city wall 'to provide access of air to the congested area.' And, for the first time, land was acquired next to the railway lines for the establishment of separate industrial areas.

We get a glimpse of the reconstruction of the city when, in 1924, the Basti Harphool Singh clearance project was sanctioned to forcibly move the poor population to the WEA. The basti was curiously placed because it housed the labour coming into the textile mills on the road to the cotton-rich Punjab, but was uncomfortably close to the bungalows of the sahibs to the north. Not surprisingly, three years later, in 1927, it began to be reported that there was a population of 15,000 in the WEA living 'in much discomfort owing to lack of services.' Consequently, a northern expansion was recommended, beyond Civil Lines and across the Grand Trunk Road, on the outskirts of the old Sabzi Mandi. Clearly, the city planners were promoting yet another displacement of the working population.

Several new roads with adjacent commercial developments were built in the new areas and each one of these showed good financial returns. However, civic conditions continued to deteriorate so much that, in 1936, an officer was specially appointed to go into the whole question of 'congestion in Delhi' and suggest appropriate measures. The recommendations of this officer formed the basis for a further expansion of the city towards the Agricultural Institute in the west with new industrial areas next to the railways there.

For this purpose, the Najafgarh jheel had to be drained and the Yamuna

canal was filled up to the Andha Mughal bridge to 'prevent malaria'. The poor were evicted from 'evil slum areas' of the Walled City (now no longer with walls), the Mohtaj Khana next to the Sabzi Mandi, Rehgarpura in Karol Bagh, and Kala Pahar near Sarai Rohilla. The lands they vacated were converted gradually into middle class residential areas. A vast area of prime agricultural land south of the Agricultural Institute was reserved for the army.

The next few years were politically tumultuous and there was little time for mundane matters like town planning. But, with the partition of the country in 1947, there was a mass exodus from across the border and 4.5 lakh refugees arrived almost overnight at Delhi. The Ministry of Rehabilitation was entrusted with the task of resettling the huge population and this it accomplished by setting up a circle of colonies around the periphery of the city, mostly within the boundary set by what is now Inner Ring Road. Not only were the displaced families rehoused but opportunities were also liberally made available for them to economically and socially rehabilitate themselves. The Ring Road itself acted as a spur to commercial development. So massive was the investment that, by 1951, the ministry considered that its job was over.

However, this huge planned expansion had its corollary effect on the city. In 1955 there was an epidemic of jaundice within the core of the city and 700 people died. The ensuing investigation revealed that considerable amounts of untreated sewage from some of the newly planned colonies was being discharged into the Najafgarh nala which, in turn, was releasing its load into the Yamuna just downstream of the pumping station at Wazirabad. The city's water supply

was thus contaminated, resulting in the spread of the epidemic. In response to the disaster the Ministry of Health immediately set up a Town Planning Organisation (TPO) and a barrage was constructed across the river at Wazirabad to separate the nala discharge from the water intake. The TPO also produced an Interim General Plan in 1957, which is a good example of how planners respond to the outcome of planned disasters.

In order to provide better administrative and financial support to the planning exercise, Delhi was declared a Union Territory in 1956. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) was constituted in 1957 by an Act of Parliament 'to check the haphazard and unplanned growth of Delhi ... with its sprawling residential colonies, without proper layouts and without the conveniences of life, and to promote and secure the development of Delhi according to plan.'

For the next three years the TPO, guided by experts from the Ford Foundation, developed a Master Plan for Delhi for 20 years and this was presented along with maps and charts for unprecedented 'public' discussion in 1960. The public debate on this initial document elicited over 600 objections and suggestions from 'the public, cooperative house-building societies, associations of industrialists, local bodies, and various Ministries and Departments of the Government of India.' An ad-hoc Board was appointed to go into all these objections and it gave its recommendations to the DDA in 1961. Eventually the Master Plan of Delhi was formally sanctioned in 1962.

Predictably, the first concern of this plan was the growth in the urban population and the planners proposed to restrict it by building a 1.6 km wide green belt around the city and divert-

ing the surplus population to the adjacent 'ring towns'. It was also decided that the 'congested' population of the walled city would be relocated in New Delhi and Civil Lines. At the same time several new industrial and commercial areas were declared for promoting growth. Thus, the DDA saw merit in both earning more revenue through industrial expansion as well as reducing expenses by curbing population increase, without examining the necessary linkage between the two.

By 1971, it was evident that the city was growing far beyond the conception of planners. The total number of industries had increased to 26,000 and there was a huge spurt in the squatter and 'unauthorised' population. So, in a frenetic burst of activity to 'restore order', the administrative machinery swung into action and, from 1975 to 1977, 1.5 lakh squatter families were forcibly moved out of the centre of the city into *planned* resettlement colonies on the periphery.

Each family was entitled to a plot of only 25 square yards with common services, and 60,000 such plots were demarcated on the low-lying Yamuna flood plain alone. Interestingly enough, all the resettlements were located very near the new industrial and residential areas, presumably designed to provide cheap and docile labour. This labour force was further enlarged by another 10 lakh in 1982 when the Asian Games overtook the city. Numerous stadia, shops, roads, hotels, flyovers, offices, apartments and colonies were constructed to cater to the needs of the games and the anticipated commercial spillover. The second Ring Road became a magnet for further commercial and residential development. But the city could not cope with this additional burden.

In 1985, the National Capital Region Board was set up in an attempt

to plan for a balanced growth of the extended region around the capital. In 1985, the first draft of the second Master Plan was also published for comments. However, unlike the first plan, this one was not summarised or translated into Hindi and Urdu, nor was it distributed publicly. Nevertheless, the draft came in for severe criticism from the government itself as being 'conceptually defective' and the Delhi Urban Arts Commission (DUAC) was asked to prepare another plan.

The DUAC took a close look at the failures of the first Master Plan to detail its own Conceptual Plan. But their plan was not to the liking of DDA and it was not put up for public hearing but discussed in a select committee. In order to avoid the process of public consultation and parliamentary debate, it was decided that the second plan would only be 'precisely a comprehensive revision of the first one.'

This revised version identified that the major part of the city's problems originated outside and their solutions lay beyond its territory. It too called for 'limiting' the population by de-industrialisation, maintenance of ecological balance in the Ridge and the Yamuna, decentralisation into districts, and provision of multi-nodal mass transport, with low-rise high-density urbanisation. Interestingly enough, it called for a special area status for the walled city as 'it cannot be developed on the basis of normal planning policies and controls' – gobbledegook for saying that the planners did not really understand the principles underlying Shahjahanabad and the older settlements.

The truth is that the planners did not even understand the implications of what they themselves had done. An outbreak of cholera in 1988 reminded them of this when 1500 people died in the 44 resettlement colonies they had

planned in 1975. It was recognised that the disease had spread through ground water contaminated by inadequate sanitation measures in the low-lying areas but an embarrassed administration shied away from being held responsible. Thus, the new plan was not only unable to tackle the problems created by the earlier one, it did not even incorporate its own analysis of the failures and weaknesses of past planning into its recommendations.

This systemic failure of modern planning is evident in the situation as it obtains today, as the date for yet another Master Plan approaches. Delhi has spread far beyond the confines of the Outer Ring Road. The original green belt has largely fallen victim to land developers, including, the DDA itself. The resettlement colonies and industrial areas that were once supposed to be at the fringe of the city, have been drawn into its ambit. The ring towns are now contiguous urban sprawls and the arterial roads and national highways are the most congested in the region. Increasing numbers of the poor continue to live in shanty towns without services.

It is presently estimated that as much as 60% of the population lives in sub-standard housing. Rapidly shrinking employment opportunities and crusading environmental activism have made the situation significantly worse for them. While the city gets the Clean City Award from far-off California, its own citizens grimly face critical inadequacies of work, shelter, civic amenities and governance.

The guidelines for the new plan issued by the Ministry of Urban Development refuse to address these issues. Instead they focus on how to promote private participation and market competition in land, housing and services; how to protect heritage, encourage

tourism and increase revenues; and how to obey the twin dictates of military order and profitable commerce. The fact is that the planners have learnt no lessons from past disasters such as the jaundice and cholera epidemics and the Asian Games. The jubilant and manipulated voices that accompany the announcement of the Yamuna channelisation plans and the gigantic mall on the Ridge, not to mention the looming Commonwealth Games, testifies to the total bankruptcy and arrogance of the planning process.

The trends visible in almost all cities and towns are fully in accordance with this face of a globalised, 'free' market and foreign investor-friendly urban planning. The chorus of 'resurgence' may conceal this ugly face for a while or keep it away from the gaze of the byte-hungry media, but the truth speaks through many forms, many eyes, and many pains. As a huge mass of people are evicted and go hungry, as their children gaze at the remorseless wasteland around them, and the social balance goes berserk, whose sweat will maintain the behemoth of 8% growth?

The politicians may swear by reforms, the administrators can rail against corruption, the judges be as activist as they come, and the glossies swoon over the latest scandals from never-never-land, but somewhere there glows the ember of protest that will ignite to shake empire and all who stand for it. There is a nascent plan in the womb of those 'who are living in poverty and destitution, who are barely eking out a miserable existence with their sweat and toil, who are helpless victims of an exploitative society, and who do not have easy access to justice.' If today the presiding juridical deities are unwilling to play midwife, then there are other conceptions, other weanings—indeed, other worlds! Because city planners do not make cities, they only imagine them!

Ensuring gender justice

POONAM KATHURIA

VIOLENCE against women is on the rise; equally the assertion by women to report the violence and seek justice. However, conventional justice dispensing mechanisms for women, whether statutory or social, face severe limitations in extending what is 'just' and 'right'. Extra-legal strategies and alternate platforms have often proved far more effective in aiding women in their quest for justice. Rooted in cultural and community norms, the alternatives actively engage women and the community in a dialogue on what is just and right. Such a process also helps to take the discourse to a higher level, challenging and, at times, even changing community norms.

SWATI (Society For Women's Action And Training Initiative) has

been working for the social and economic empowerment of women in Surendranagar district of Gujarat state. The district, popularly known as Jhalawad, was once ruled by the Jhala Rajputs who gifted the district its highly feudal culture, the main victims of which were and continue to be women and lower caste groups. Several indicators, including the low sex ratio (869 per 1000 males) and the state's second lowest rate of enrolment of girls in school, are reflective of discriminatory attitudes and practices. Though incidence of domestic violence is rarely directly reported, the high number of maintenance case before the courts and legal aid cells provide testimony to the contrary.

Women rarely seek recourse to justice primarily because of insufficient support at home and in the community, lack of information and confusion about whom to approach and what needs to be done. Another reason is experience with unscrupulous lawyers who often misguide and try to prolong the case. A fear of the legal system, which most women find unfathomable, is another major reason.

SWATI works in four blocks through block level women's collectives called the Mahila Vikas Sangh (MVS). Over six thousand women in three blocks are members of the MVS. SWATI has taken up the issue of violence against women and systematically built up a facilitative environment of awareness and support at the village level, and professional as well as institutional support mechanisms at the organizational level.

Typically, SWATI's initial work on violence involved working with the formal system for addressing cases of violence. This it did through establishing legal aid and counselling support services for women facing violence and discrimination, creating

legal rights awareness and mobilizing community support at the village level through various forums, including formation of vigilance committees. However, the formal legal system was found too distant and unresponsive and addressing domestic violence at the village sangh level had certain limitations of women facing rebuttal and pressure of relational and neighbourhood ties.

A need was felt for an objective and capable forum that could overcome some of these issues. Thus a more structured paralegal platform for handling issues of violence and exploitation or for advising and supporting the women was created at the level of the mahila vikas sangh. The mahila nyaya samitis (women justice committees), as these forums are called, are administered by women, trained and equipped with a gender just approach.

The nyaya samitis have been activated over the last year through a process of training and actual handling of cases. The samitis are today active in two blocks of Patdi and Dhrangadra in Surendranagar district. This article seeks to analyze the role of the nyaya samitis in seeking redressal for women and their potential as an alternative to the other redressal mechanisms, both the jati panch/panchayat set up by the community and governed by customary norms and rules that the caste has set out for itself, and the statutory mechanisms set up by the Indian state.

In order to equip and orient the mahila nyaya samitis, SWATI carried out intensive training of sangha (village collective) level women leaders. Over 45 women in the two blocks of Patdi and Dhrangadra were trained. The training programme involved building a feminist perspective on violence against women, imparting knowledge of the laws for women, legal and extra legal mechanisms,

counselling, record keeping and arbitration skills. The samitis are already functioning in Patdi and Dhrangadra blocks under the aegis of the mahila vikas sangh. The platform has given them a community based identity and a sanctity that spans across communities.

Caste in several parts of India is referred to as *jati*, *nati* or *nat*. Every caste has a *jati panch* (caste leaders) and *jati panchayats* (caste assemblies). The main role that a *jati panchayat* plays is to uphold and guard the customary practices that form the identity of the caste. In most castes these customary practices assume the symbolic value of caste 'honour' and identity, which if transgressed can attract punishment ranging from monetary fines to being declared an 'outcaste'. The stigma of being an outcaste extends to the entire family and future generations of the transgressor(s). This proves to be particularly hurtful because it may cut off the social interaction ranging from food to marrying one's children within the caste. *Jati panchayats* also regulate social relations and conduct of the *jati* members, mediating disputes in marriages, property and inheritance.

It has been observed that the *jati panchayat* is a major institution that sanctions and promotes violence against women. Robert Hayden in his study of the Nandiwalla caste panchayats observes: 'Despite the fact that the caste panchayats are admired for their non-violent and self reliant conflict management/resolution capabilities, there is no denying of the fact that this "folk system" has not been fair to dalits and other weaker sections of society' (Hayden, April 1999).

Traditionally no women anywhere, whosoever, are part of the panch. In most communities women, unless they are the accused or are the

accuser, cannot even attend jati panch meetings. Not only does the system work against providing basic rights to women, it also condemns any alternative justice giving mechanisms.

Among the several cases before the nyaya samiti, the case of Harkhu Thakore (a koli patel woman) deserves to be analyzed as it marked the beginning of SWATI's understanding of the role of jati panchayats in upholding and perpetuating violence against women. The nyaya samiti, with the backing of the mahila vikas sangh, questioned the jati panch and its functioning directly.

Harkhu ben of Dasada village was forced by her husband Ganesh bhai and father-in-law to leave her marital home. Her husband alleged that their child was not his. Incidentally, Harkhu's father-in-law had also made the same allegation against her mother-in-law, his first wife, and forced her to leave the house.

Her father-in-law called for a meeting of the jati panch and sought a divorce for his son. The panch summoned Harkhu and her family and forcibly made Harkhu sign the divorce papers, and subsequently levied a fine of Rs 15,000 on her family for divorcing her husband. Technically they were correct. The law made by the jati panch said that if a woman divorced her husband, she would have to pay a fine of Rs 5000. In this case they also levied a charge of infidelity, raising the fine to Rs 15,000. The panch demanded Harkhu's father pay the amount by 5 May 2003.

Nani ben, a dalit woman of Nagwada village, advised them to approach the mahila nyaya samiti in Patdi. The case was discussed at the monthly meeting of village representatives who were furious at the treatment meted out to Harkhu. Discussions revealed that everyone had experience of the unfair and ad hoc judgments

doled out by the jati panch, that the jati panch was a highly partisan and corrupt institution, that its judgments were always in favour of the rich and powerful. Most often the rulings tended to fault and punish the woman and her family and, even when given in favour of women, reflect a patriarchal mode and invariably go easy on the men.

It was decided to challenge the jati panch's decision on Harkhu. Representatives of over 20 village sanghas went to village Sushia and questioned Tala bhai, a member of the panch, for his role in Harkhu's case. Though taken aback, he agreed that the panch had done wrong. The women demanded that the nyaya samiti summon the jati panch. The panch ignored the first summons. However, since the case had received publicity, the jati panch was under pressure to vindicate their stand. A contributory factor was that on 8 March, at a *sammelan* to mark the International Women's Day, Harkhu and her father spoke openly about the treatment meted out to them in a gathering of 400 women.

The jati panch was summoned a second time. It is indicative of the pressure the mahila nyaya samiti could exert that on their written summons, the jati panch leaders from 14 villages came to the mahila vikas sangh office for a discussion. Harkhu's parents, her husband's family and women from various village sangathans were also present. At the meeting Harkhu lashed out at the panch and her father-in-law. She publicly exposed him by revealing that he had thrown out her mother-in-law using exactly the same accusations. The jati panch was left with no justification for why they had forced her to sign the divorce papers.

The panch now shifted tack, converting Harkhu's charge against her father-in-law into an issue of disrespectful behaviour. They walked

out, threatening dire consequences for SWATI, the mahila nyaya samiti and Harkhu's family.

Harkhu's struggle and her family's harassment by the panch continues. In the meantime Harkhu has filed for maintenance in the court. However, since then, another woman who suffered atrocities at the hands of the jati panch has approached the mahila nyaya samiti for justice.

The patriarchal value system of the jati panch has been documented elsewhere too. In the Nandiwalla gram panchayat, if a kallar man misbehaves with a woman (in local parlance termed *madipitttu elluttal*, pulling the saree), the village panchayat usually decrees that the sister of the offender be brought to the village square and her saree pulled by a male member of the affected woman's family. It has to be the offender's sister and not his wife since she comes from another man's family (Hayden, 1999).

Despite many such experiences questioning the integrity of the jati panch, why do people still approach them? One obvious reason is the expensive, long and tiring procedures marking the Indian judicial system. The jati panch at least achieves a quick disposal of the case. It does not matter if in the process justice itself is disposed off. The other reason is the alienation of the legal system from cultural and community norms and social practices. This is invoked by communities to prevent women from approaching the courts since taking recourse to law is seen as an external intervention in what is believed to be personal and private to a family or, in a wider sense, to the caste/community.

It is in such situations that the mahila nyaya samitis hold out hope. They have an inherent sense of community sensibilities along with a gender just perspective shaped both by

feminist ideology and the law of the land. They score over other systems for they focus on changing attitudes and community norms.

The samiti functions as a formal system on an informal platform. The women have undergone intensive legal training in a gender just framework. They meet on fixed days in the offices of the mahila vikas sangh and people with complaints come to get their cases heard.

The nyaya samitis follow certain procedures that are quasi legal and similar to existing legal aid support and social security forums. The mahila nyaya samiti, for instance, minutes all its discussions and the decisions are written up as formal documents signed by both parties and witnesses. A central feature of the methodology involves converting the private complaint of a woman into a public debate. The mandal women/leaders, the working committee of the MVS, constitute a strong presence at the arbitration forum. This plays a crucial role in converting family dynamics into topics for democratic discussion on what is right and wrong. The case of Jamna – a koli patel woman, is illustrative.

Jamna of Naradi is a member of the sangathan. Mother of five, she and her husband work as casual labourers. Her husband drank heavily and often beat her up. On several occasions she left home for her parent's place, but was forced to return because of the children. Matters really got out of hand when her husband mutilated Jamna's hand. The village sangha women were incensed, insisting that this was not to be tolerated and that Jamna should complain to the police. The mahila vikas sangha helped her file a police complaint against her husband. The police was requested by the women to give Jamna's husband a 'thorough' beating and keep him for a while in

lock-up. He was arrested on her complaint and the police did exactly what the women had requested. Jamna's husband has since returned, now drinks less and has not dared to beat her again.

This case illustrates an important feature of the process and approach. It brings into public debate what was hitherto private, pushing the community into thinking above what is just and unjust and helping take progressive decisions that could win acceptance and consent of the community. Otherwise, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a situation where a man who is arrested and beaten up at his wife's instance, not only accepts her but is also apologetic about his behaviour. More important, the community too accepts this.

In a typical court case even if the man is awarded six months of punishment, it does not mean he has changed, that the situation for the woman has improved, or that the woman has got justice. Justice will prevail only if the woman is allowed to live her life with respect and in peace, with her rights intact. For this the man, his family and the community all need to realize that such conduct is unacceptable.

The samitis work on changing the community's understanding of what is acceptable and what is not. In the process they have reshaped community norms, for instance, expanded the definition of maintenance to include the time the woman spends away from the matrimonial family without formal divorce. How this happens is exemplified in the case of Nagji ben.

Nagji ben of village Dasada in Patdi block had shifted to her natal home due to dissatisfaction with the arrangements at her marital home. She approached the nyaya samiti for help. Her husband and his family agreed and it was decided that Nagji ben

would join him only after matters had improved for which he requested a time period of three months. In the interim, he agreed to pay a maintenance of Rs 1000 a month.

This is symbolic of true attitudinal change and has implications for setting up new community norms. What distinguish the nyaya samiti 'methods' of addressing violence are the perspectives that inform them and the processes they follow. Take the case of Harkhu, illustrated earlier. How could any 'proof' have resolved the problem when its roots lay in the attitudes and perspectives around relationships?

The nyaya samiti is an inexpensive and accessible forum. What adds to its acceptability is that the decision-making involves giving time to craft workable solutions rather than focus on absolute positions of right and wrong. Further, it admits to the possibility of renegotiation if the proposed solution does not work. The women who arbitrate at the forum are from the local socio-cultural milieu. Alongwith sensitivity to women's issues and an understanding of violence, they also draw upon an intuitive cultural sense of the beliefs, values and normative codes of the area. This contributes to the effectiveness of their judgment which is based on information gathered from the immediate community about the family and its situation. All this goes into the process of negotiation. In sum, the biggest strength of these women is a sense of right/s, gender justice and an understanding of the legal system. The use of local cultural idiom and mores has further enhanced the acceptance of these forums (Bhatia and Rajan, April 2003).

It would be difficult to visualize such a forum without a strong basis in a movement for mass awareness and support. The samiti draws its power and

legitimacy from its rooting in a larger collective or platform that supports and promotes this process. That it has the possibility of going beyond is unquestionable, for 'it represents the effort to reinvent the local conflict management/resolution heritage without perpetuating the exclusion of women, dalits, minorities and other weaker sections of the society, and the domination and exploitation of landlords' (Hayden, 1999).

Nevertheless, the nyaya samitis have significant limitations. For instance, high stake cases such as property disputes are not brought to them. The forums are being reduced to mediating on women's issues and not functioning as community arbitration forums, thereby limiting their influence. There is need to broad-base them to include other issues of discrimination and exploitation. They must move beyond matrimonial relationships and norms and respond to other forms of gender-based and caste violence.

The nyaya samitis in a sense work as a bi-legal forum that can take recourse to the formal legal system if its mediation and judgement is not adhered to. There is need for such initiatives to expand and gain wider legitimacy in the social as well as judicial domain. Such plural conflict management/resolution mechanisms and processes can add to the country's socio-economic-political health, vital in situations where justice is often delayed (and hence denied) by our slow, overburdened and increasingly expensive courts.

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The globalisation of inequality

P. SAINATH

'Our planet is not balanced. Too few control too much, and too many have too little to hope for. Too much turmoil, too many wars. Too much suffering.' Depending on who you are, you might think that this is Mother Teresa or Sub-Commandante Marcos of the Zapatistas. Actually, it's James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, speaking at the joint WB-IMF meeting in Dubai in September this year.

A few days after Wolfensohn got it off his chest, the *International Herald Tribune* reported that the International Monetary Fund, which bitterly attacked Malaysia's Mahathir Mohammad during the East Asian financial crisis, has since had a rethink. Aw shucks, we were, you know, sort of wrong: 'The IMF has since accepted that Mahathir's (capital and currency controls) formula worked.'

Around the same period, the *Wall Street Journal* came up with this original idea. Well, original for the Journal, anyway. It wrote: 'Markets are a great way to organise economic activity, but they need adult supervision.' Now had they figured this out 20 years ago, millions of poor families might have been spared a great deal of misery. Misery brought about precisely by the idea that markets could solve every single

problem of the human race. An idea propagated forcefully and ruthlessly by the World Bank, the IMF and the Wall Street Journal.

Any criticism of the market as God these past two decades led to being branded a heretic. The market had all the answers. There was no miracle it could not perform. Some, like Swaminathan Aiyer, argued that markets alone could save the environment. Others, like *Time* magazine, asserted that hunger was but a function of anti-market systems. Want jobs? Leave it to the market. The market wasn't just good for democracy. It was Democracy. This was the baloney of the last 15-20 years. There were other possible positions. Such as that you might need the market. As a tool, not as a tyranny. As just one instrument amongst many, not as an all encompassing ideology. But that would have been blasphemy.

So are the high priests of the Bank, the Fund and the Wall Street Journal sincere about this realisation? That markets need adult supervision? No such luck. (Never mind that countless millions across the world believe the Bank and the Fund—not to mention the Journal—urgently require adult supervision.) One of the tenets of market fundamentalism is that the preacher is always exempted from the practice. Iraq today presents a great example. The first declaration of the American-run Iraqi governing council was to open up every single sector of the Iraqi economy to full foreign ownership.

At the same time, any Iraqi ownership was effectively pre-empted. Two local entrepreneurs for instance, had set up the country's first cell phone network after the war. They were doing a thriving business when they were shut down physically, and the network building job was handed over to MCI of America, a company

that had no experience in that field and which only months ago was caught in the biggest accounting fraud in history.

So much for free markets. The Iraqi market is now free for American corporations ranging from Halliburton and MCI to scores of others. Halliburton is importing oil into Iraq—a country with the world's second largest reserves of oil—at a cost of \$1.70 a gallon. It actually costs 71 cents a gallon in the region, but the Americans have established a very captive 'free' market. This 'opening up' process resembles the opium wars of the 19th century.

Let us now look at the growth of inequality. Inequality is worse in today's world than at any point since World War II. Inequality has grown faster in the last 15 years than in the past 50. The series of United Nations Human Development Reports since 1990 establishes that very clearly. Look at just a few of its dimensions. Rich-poor divides, resource inequality, income and consumption, access to health, or even just to water, or jobs. This crisis now affects most of the planet.

Of the many trends in globalisation, the crucial one today is corporate globalism. A world driven by and for corporate profits. Based on corporate greed rather than human need. It's a world marked by the collapse of restraint on corporate power, in every continent.

The income gap between the top 20 per cent of the world's population and the bottom fifth has more than doubled. By 1998, the top 20 per cent consumed 86 percent of all goods and services. The bottom fifth made do with 1.3 per cent. The world's richest 200 people, according to the 1999 Human Development Report, 'more than doubled their net worth in the four years to 1998, to over \$1 trillion. The

assets of the top three billionaires are more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries and their 600 million people together.' By 2003, that position had worsened. To the point that the Fund and Bank are making bleats of caution (if not of remorse).

What is being termed an 'economic recovery' in the USA, as Professor Paul Krugman of Princeton points out, is a period in which the same economy has lost three million jobs. It has also happened in a period when Chief Executive Officers (CEO) salaries reached their highest ever. (Jack Welch of GE with his \$123 million compensation and Richard Grasso of the New York Stock Exchange with his \$140 million, for instance.) The number of Americans living in poverty rose sharply to 12.4 percent of the population. And among minority Blacks and Hispanics, that percentage is almost double.

Russia, once the second superpower, was subjected to 'shock therapy' and other doctrines of market fundamentalism in the 1990s. The former USSR lost 42 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product in a spectacularly short period. A remarkable achievement. No country has ever done that without a famine or a war. Russia did it with just the help of Jeffrey Sachs and the IMF. Poverty in Russia skyrocketed, accompanying a rise in mortality rates and high levels of distress.

Each winter, hundreds die of the cold. In 2000-01, well over 300 died in Moscow alone of hypothermia. But in that same season sales of Mercedes Benz cars in Moscow leaped by one-third. And Giorgio Armani opened a new salon in the city, to be welcomed by old friends Versace and Bulgari who had already set up store there. (The Herald Tribune referred to

Armani's delayed arrival as 'Giorgio-come-lately'.)

China, long one of the most egalitarian societies in the world, now has countless dollar millionaires. Yet, the gap between rich and poor, coastal and interior China has grown worse. Also, the effects of certain kinds of development show up in other ways. Two giant and rapidly growing sectors catch the eye. Both are misery related. One, according to China's own People's Procurate, is corruption. The other is prostitution.

Would you believe that Afghanistan had the fastest growing economy this year? Not too difficult if your earlier growth was sub-zero. The Afghan economy grew at 20 per cent. But more than 50 per cent of that came from the opium crop. And what of Africa? Ask Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz (who was dismissed from the World Bank for heresy against market fundamentalism). As he points out, the African continent, subjected to forcibly imposed policies of the IMF, has lost nearly a fourth of her income. Even as African cotton farmers who grow the cheapest cotton in the world go bankrupt, American cotton farmers get an annual subsidy of about a million dollars each.

So great is Africa's overall crisis that its skilled personnel are leaving in alarming numbers. According to the *Financial Times*, the entire continent in 2001 had just 20,000 engineers and scientists to serve a population of 600 million. The result: there are more African scientists and engineers working in the United States than in all of Africa, says the Geneva-based International Organisation for Migration (OIM). This drain of skills is making poverty reduction almost impossible. This goes on intensifying, with not a word of protest. Yet, in today's world, if 400 low-paid

American jobs were to go to Africa, the squawking in the US would last for months in the media.

In Latin America, long the world's most unequal region, inequality rose sharply in the '90s. In this part of the world, 100 million people fell below the poverty line in the 1980s. So the shock of the '90s came atop that misery. In Mexico alone, an additional 11 million people fell below the poverty line between 1990-96.

Worldwide, as FAO Director General Jacques Diouf pointed out (at the same meeting where Wolfensohn saw the light), in the last 15 years, as rich countries increased subsidies to their farmers, poor countries went from being net exporters of food to net importers.

India is a classic example of engineered inequality. On 20 October, *The New York Times* had a front page lead celebrating the birth of a class of people in India who spend their weekends at malls. It failed to mention that this year, India slipped three places in the human development ranking of the United Nations. We now stand at rank 127. This year's UN Human Development Report had found that for the bulk of the Indian population, living standards are lower than those of Botswana – or even the occupied territories of Palestine. So while some of the richest people in the world live in India, so do the largest number of the world's poor.

The euphoria over one good monsoon (actually, we've had several these past 15 years) seems to have erased any debate in the media on what's happening in Indian agriculture. Small farms are dying. Investment in agriculture is down. Rural credit has collapsed and debt has exploded. Many are losing their lands as a few celebrate at the malls. In March this year, as Professor Utsa Patnaik

points out, the per person availability of foodgrain was lower than it had been during the notorious Bengal Famine of 1942-43.

Thousands of farmers have committed suicide since the late 1990s. In a single district of Andhra Pradesh, Anantapur, more than 2400 farmers have taken their own lives since 1997. Elsewhere in India, like in Gujarat or Mumbai, the loss of countless jobs in industry is boosting religious fundamentalism. In the 2002 violence in Gujarat in which over 1500 lives were lost, many of the rioters were workers from shut-down textile mills.

The huge new inequalities are feeding into existing ones: For instance, in a society where they are already disadvantaged, hunger hits women much harder. Millions of families are making do with less food. In the Indian family women eat last. After they have fed their husbands and children. With smaller amounts of food being left over now, poor Indian women are eating even less than they did earlier. The strain on their bodies and health becomes greater. Yet, health care is ever more expensive.

So what sort of a society are we building in the new, confident India? We are closing small health centres and opening super luxury hospitals that 90 per cent of Indians cannot afford; shutting down primary schools and opening colleges based on exorbitant donations for admissions; closing libraries and opening multiplexes; winding up bus depots and services as we expand the airport systems.

Thousands of rich Indians now patronise weight loss clinics to shed some of their prosperity – during a period when the foodgrain available per person sharply declined. The salaries of CEOs are up, even as the pathetic real wage of landless workers

sharpens their misery. We are closing fair-price food shops and opening food boutiques. We complain ritually each year of the 'century's greatest drought', but build hundreds of water parks and golf courses.

Even in the basic needs of people, the divides are startling. Mumbai faced a severe water problem this summer. You wouldn't know this if you live in the rich colonies. But in the slums countless women line up for water every morning. From four in the morning they begin positioning their buckets in line to stake their place in the queue. Sometimes, they might not get the water they wait for, which is no more than 40-50 litres a day.

In and around the same Mumbai, in the same period, there were 24 amusement water parks using 50 billion—that's right, 50 billion—litres of water a day for the entertainment of the rich. In the desert state of Rajasthan, plagued by actual scarcity of water for five years, more water parks and golf courses were planned. A single golf course takes 1.8 to 2.3 million litres of water a day through the season. On that amount of water, over 100,000 villagers in the state could have all their water needs met for the entire summer season.

Worldwide, water is shifting from farmland and food crop to swimming pools, amusement parks, water slides, golf courses and gardens. We go ahead with this even as we know ours is a century where wars will be fought over water.

Health and living conditions: As health care gets dismantled, or privatised and more expensive, there is a lot of SARS by other names waiting to happen. The number of deaths due to SARS worldwide was about 800-odd. In four months. That's less than half the number killed by tuberculosis in India each day. But SARS got a lot of

attention because it affected the flying classes. The same with our 'plague' of 1994-95. It killed fewer than any major disease in India, but it frightened the beautiful people. Plague germs are notorious for their non-observance of class distinctions. They don't require passports and visas. They board aircraft and fly club class to New York.

Why was China the worst hit by SARS? It has much to do with the economic philosophy of the past couple of decades. In China, you accessed your health care through workplace, your factory or school, or related networks. This went up in a chain from bottom to top. The small medical post at the local level posting a problem to the laboratory at the next level. When thousands of these enterprises were shut down, millions lost their access to health care. Many of these little health posts ceased to exist. When SARS broke out, China's early warning system had been dismantled. The Chinese were taken by surprise. SARS cost the economy billions. Hong Kong Singapore, many others also found themselves hurt by SARS.

But why only China? This year, the government of France confirmed officially that nearly 15,000 people had died from a heat wave in August. That is far more devastating than SARS. Those dying were overwhelmingly elderly, senior citizens. This was not the first year France has seen a heat wave. What happened was that health care had seen serious cuts in recent times, particularly affecting the elderly.

Several French parliamentarians have demanded a special debate on the so-called health reforms.

In America, tens of thousands of elderly, aging Americans are crossing the border into Canada in order to be able to buy affordable drugs. The same drugs are sold both sides of the border. But in America, the corporations

marketing them have total control over pricing. Now the American state and police are intervening. Not on behalf of the poor and elderly, but on behalf of the corporations. Police are raiding pharmacies and chemists in Michigan, confiscating genuine but cheaper drugs.

In Africa, thanks to the intellectual property arrangements presided over by the WTO, millions dying of AIDS were denied cheaper drugs. The American companies controlling the patents threatened Indian companies producing the cheaper version with legal action leading possibly to their closure. After an international outcry, a compromise was reached. But the drugs are not as cheap as they could have been. Corporate profits took precedence over the lives of poor Africans.

What SARS shows you, though, is that the damage visited on the poor, the helpless, the elderly, come back to visit us. China saved some money in shutting down health care for poor rural people. It paid billions in lost tourism and other factors due to SARS. Health issues will be further complicated by the living standards built into the current dispensation. According to the latest report of the UN Habitat, one in every three human beings will live in a slum by 2030. What do we call that? From global village to global slum? The globalisation of squalor? Imagine the kind of health complications we are looking at when a third of humanity lives in slums.

The military dimension: Global inequality expresses itself in the military sphere, too. In no period of history has the gap between one power and the rest been so enormous. Yet, while the military dimension is overwhelming, it often turns out to be neither decisive nor final as the Americans are finding

out in Iraq. The increasing use of military force, coupled with changing geopolitical realities, also raises anew the questions surrounding military bases, such as those in Okinawa. An internal conflict in the Philippines has been globalised and soldiers from bases in Okinawa and Guam are being used for that purpose. And as the Japanese begin to find out the costs of carrying American baggage in Iraq, one Japanese anti-base protestor put into four words, what volumes of security studies do not honestly tell you: finally, bases mean war.

War is a part of this form of globalisation, not an aberration. It has already seen the seizing of resources and the looting of whole countries. The world's second largest oil reserves are now reserved for a few corporations. The 'axis of evil' idea that further destabilised the Korean peninsula saw military power as a decisive mechanism. This illusion has also led to a dangerous nuclear brinkmanship between India and Pakistan. And underscores Israel's brutality in the occupied territories. Corporate-driven globalism generates insecurity and trauma. It speaks global, but promotes local xenophobia and national chauvinism. All countries will have to cope with these.

This military dimension is built into and based on the inequalities of our time. Yet, it is this dimension that is increasingly being resorted to in our time (and not just by the United States). The free market in Iraq is simply and plainly a military construct. Crushing Afghanistan in military terms was easy. Now the US has to face the reality that opium cultivation is higher than it ever was during the time of the Taliban. And that Hamid Karzai is President of a few rooms of the palace in Kabul. Little else.

The privatisation of everything: Another central tenet of market fundamentalism dominates our times. The privatisation of everything—from industry to intellect. The huge, rapid privatisation in Russia, with rigged auctions and fraudulent sales, led to the rise of what even the government there calls 'gangster capitalism'. A battle now rages between elected government and mafia oligarchs. Interestingly, even while supporting the arrested corporate chief, the western media do not conceal that they were and are essentially corrupt mafiosos.

Meanwhile, in country after country, the privatisation of basic services has caused unimaginable distress. Serious inequality has begun to surface in countries that have not known it in a long time. In many of these processes, for instance, Japan has remained relatively unaffected in any significant way. The condition of the lowest 20 per cent of Japanese society would be far better than that same section in, say the United States. Given this, while inequalities grow worldwide, can a Japan remain immune? Unlikely.

For one thing Japan's national debt is three times her GDP and about 36 per cent of total global debt. For another, new data suggest that even in that prosperous land, at least one-fifth of all households have, in the words of the *Asahi Shimbun* daily, 'no financial assets—no savings, no insurance, no investments.' At the same time, the value of assets for households that did have savings was at its highest ever. So the gaps are showing. Both extremes were visible in the Survey on Financial Assets and Liabilities released last month by a unit of the Bank of Japan.

And it's going to get more complicated. Especially as Japan

contemplates getting on to that privatisation-of-everything bandwagon. If Japan actually privatises management of her 250 trillion yen Postal Savings and 150 trillion yen Simplified Insurance Cover, she could be asking for very big trouble. Waiting in the wings are the very 'fund managers' who worked such wonders in the United States. This, after all, is the Age of the Mega Con.

Unravelling time: One thing about the prediction that less than 30 years from now, slums will house a third of humanity. The vast majority of these people will be not in Africa or Latin America but here in Asia. The worse the economic ravages, the greater the growth will be of fundamentalism and neo-fascist trends. We are witnessing the greatest loot and grab sortie in history. Not in one country, but in most. The era of giant collapses has already begun. Enron and WorldCom produced the largest bankruptcies in history. And ruined countless retirees whose pension funds had been invested in them. To MCI goes the honour of the largest accounting fraud in history. But you will see many more.

So What Can We Do? Well, for one thing, we can abandon market fundamentalism for a course that places people, not profits, at the centre of everything.

The money required to address basic problems is smaller than what many might imagine. On an additional \$28 billion a year the world could provide basic education for every child, clean water and safe sewers to every human, and basic health and nutrition for everyone on the planet. Too costly at 28 billion? Well, every year, Europeans and Americans spend between \$36-40 billion on cosmetics, ice cream and pet food alone. \$28 billion is also a tiny part of the wealth of the world's richest 225 individuals,

who have a combined worth of over \$1 trillion.

Where does the public intellectual, or for that matter any public-spirited human being, stand on these issues? How does he or she respond? Too many are celebrating the new prosperity: *The Indian Express* newspaper writes editorials asserting greed is good. It speaks of the value of the 'Greed Dividend'. Many have become private intellectuals, owned by corporations, monopolies and foundations. Call it privatisation of the intellect and soul.

You would think that for something to be global it has to be inclusive and encompassing. Oddly enough, the world we call global is in fact based on exclusion, not inclusion. How does this system include or even need cotton growers in Burkina Faso? Cane cutters in the Caribbean, fishermen in Bali or for that matter Nova Scotia? Where is its place for small farmers in Bangladesh, poor peasants in Honduras, Cambodian woodcutters, Indian fishing communities, indigenous hunter-gatherers, girl students in Afghanistan, wood craftsmen in Zambia, or dam-displaced people in China?

How does corporate-driven globalism in any way need these people or include them? A system that excludes maybe two billion people – maybe far more – cannot be sustained. But here's the good news: the excluded are responding. In October, Bolivian indigenous people cancelled a corrupt gas deal with the United States. Then they cancelled their president as well. In Venezuela, people saved the president they wanted – in a military coup supported by Washington and a coup which *The New York Times* wrote an editorial supporting – 24 hours before it collapsed. (The same people are all for democracy in Iraq).

In Britain, a prime minister is on survival notice. In the United States, a president with record popularity ratings enters election year fearful of defeat. There was even a silver lining to the clouds of war. For perhaps the first time in history, huge, giant anti-war movements were on the streets before the war in Iraq began. London saw what was probably its biggest anti-war rally ever – before the war began. It speaks so well of all the anti-war protests that they happened in the face of the most enormous barrage of pro-war media propaganda across the globe.

In Seattle, in Cancun, in Davos and New York. In Washington and Prague, in Genoa and Quebec, the numbers of those protesting the globalisation of inequality grows, it does not diminish. In the World Social Forum at Porto Allegre, in a hundred other forums, people seek transnational public unity against transnational corporate tyranny. Whether they are finding all the answers is another issue. The point is they are addressing many of the right questions.

There are huge energies now unleashed in the global arena. From anti-war to social justice movements. The protestors at Seattle and Cancun can in fact be seen as real globalisers. Only, they seek to globalise not greed but social justice movements. To globalise people's cooperation against the exploitation of people. From political reform movements and minority rights platforms to basic struggles for democracy and human rights, it's happening. All those concerns you have heard addressed earlier. Major battles are on for a radical redistribution of resources in several societies. All these are in the global arena. The challenge is how to marry these energies. Another world is possible. Other worlds are possible.

In search of the 'Gandiva'

SUMANTA BANERJEE

'Arjuna! Arjuna!
The masses are crying out for you.
They need today your mighty Gandiva.
Cast aside your false robes of the impotent
Brihannala
And seek your weapon in the Shami tree of
rebellion.'¹

THESE are the days of a 'feel-good' economy and unashamed hedonism. 'Yuppies' (some not so young) and industrialists, politicians and bureaucrats, contractors and film stars rub shoulders with fixers and mafia dons, high class pimps and call-girls, in a democratic show of their wealth in glitzy parties. Sometimes they press the wrong button on the elevator of upward mobility – and then they get caught for scams!

But our ministers assure us that their lifestyle is a sign of the glowing health of our economy (e.g. 'five-star culture... a synonym for excellence' – Finance Minister Jaswant Singh²) which the new environment of glo-

balization and liberalization has brought about by freeing the industrialists and politicians from the clutches of socialism. If we raise our voice against their dubious means of income, they retort – What's wrong? This is an expression which is no longer a moral question, but an aggressive affirmation made by the new Indian privileged rich to register their right to make money by hook or by crook (euphemistically described as market economy) and dismiss the rest of the population as an incompetent swinish multitude which cannot compete with them in the new global order.

They declare nonchalantly – Forget the Gandhian and Communist bleeding hearts! Enough of worshiping and glamorizing poverty! Get rid of the image of that 'half-naked fakir' who has been symbolizing India all these years. What the hell? We are a 100-200 million strong *biradari* marching into the world of developed nations, sharing their living standards and consumption patterns. It is we alone, therefore, who have the right to represent India. We are manufacturing new cars and television sets, registering our growth in information technology and mobile phone subscriptions, building exclusive townships and malls for ourselves, and thinning down our establishment costs (by retrenching workers). We are now just waiting

1. An excerpt from *Madhubangshir Gali* composed by the Bengali poet Jyotirindra Moitra (1911-77) during the 1940s when Bengal was famished by starvation deaths against the backdrop of the Second World War. The reference is to Arjuna in the *Virata-parva* (fourth canto) of the *Mahabharata*, which describes him in hiding, when he was forced to take on the role of a eunuch called Brihannala, and hid his powerful weapon, the Gandiva bow, in the branches of a tree called Shami.

2. Interview in *The Indian Express*, 11 November 2003.

to fashion our own mascot to replace that frail human figure whose statues defile the street corners in Indian cities!

Dare we remind the biradari of the other Indians whose plight shocks the rest of the world? The latest UNDP report reveals that India is home to 233 million hungry people and over 40 million children do not go to primary schools. Even our own Census, by carrying out a house-to-house survey in 2000, unfolds the quality of life that the average Indian citizen leads. Only 52 per cent of our people live in houses with permanent walls and roof. A mere 56 per cent have electricity, and over 60 per cent families do not get water at home. Add to this the lack of medical facilities in the rural areas and the steady deterioration in the services rendered by hospitals in major cities – and all these in a situation where epidemics like cholera, malaria and even plague (which has been eradicated in the developed nations) revisit us every year.

Add again the daily reports of lynching by casteist bigots and massacres by religious fanatics, and we get a total picture of modern India. It makes our country stink in the opinion of civilized people. At best, India evokes pity among the global humanitarian institutions, some among which record the violations of human rights, and some organize more charity from foreign donors to help the Indian poor. At worst, it elicits disdain from the snooty corporate barons of the West who laugh at the desperate efforts of the Indian parvenu to imitate their lifestyle.

How are the other Indians – the 800 million – behaving? The majority remain poor, but they do not want to be left behind in their steady adherence to traditional socio-religious practices, as well as in their new pursuit of

modern consumerist values, however expensive both might be. To go back to the Census household survey, we find that during the last decade more places of worship (some 2.4 million) had cropped up than schools and colleges (1.5 million) and hospitals (0.6 million).

While one can surely blame the state for neglecting its responsibility for providing more educational and medical facilities to the people, one can also ask these people why they choose to contribute their hard-earned money to the building of temples (which include mosques, *gurudwaras*, churches, as well as dubious institutions run by charlatan *babajis* and *matajis*) instead of schools and hospitals in their localities? Pressures to reinforce conservative socio-religious customs and taboos – some of which are against all humanitarian norms – appear to have mounted up among our common people.

Our newspapers are littered daily with reports of bride-burning and lynching of couples accused of inter-caste marriages or liaisons within the Hindu community; imposition of diktats like the *burqua* and other restraints on Muslim women followed by punishments like physical attacks on their violation of such diktats; killings of women who are branded as witches by tribal communities. Ironically enough, most of these murderous acts are carried out in rural India with social sanction of the villagers, often under the auspices of *panchayats* – supposed to have been duly elected by the villagers under our government's plan of devolution and decentralization of power to the poor.

Community leaders in villages are reinforcing divisions along caste, religious, tribal, linguistic and other divisive lines to such an extent that even parents are motivated to lynch

their own children if they marry outside their respective clans – acts that are sanctioned by the community as 'honour killings'. Needless to say, the victims are mostly women.

The new commercial and consumerist values quite often coexist with these traditional and conservative socio-religious norms within the psyche of a single individual. In most of the states, according to the Census findings, households which lack basic amenities like toilets, spend their money on buying television sets rather than on trying to install toilets in their homes or neighbourhoods. Evidently they prefer to queue for hours before public toilets in urban slums. In rural areas they hide behind bushes to attend to nature's call, and in some places even walk for miles to bathe in a river or a pond. Yet, there are 26 million television sets in rural India catering to a variety of clientele, ranging from private households of rich and middle farmers to the better-off some among the sharecroppers and artisans.

Barring the times of elections and cricket matches, they mostly hook on to the channels that offer Bollywood entertainments of dance and song sequences and advertisements of consumer goods like the latest in sartorial designs or perfumes on the one hand, and mythological films which dangle divine miracles before their eyes and religious discourses that advise them to seek solace at the feet of the godmen and god-women on the other. One leading Indian political commentator defends this popular craze for the idiot-box entertainment, and sneeringly dismisses the 'do-gooder socialist government's' past attempts in the 1950s to educate our people in classical music, in the following words: '...governments can't prevent people from having fun... Indians love to have fun...' ³

It is exactly this kind of condescending encouragement of the lowest common denominator by a philistine establishment that has led to the widespread proclivity towards the four C's – consumerism, conservatism, corruption and crime – all in the name of 'having fun' – not only among the rich, but also large sections of the poor and underprivileged in India. Crude symbols advertised to appeal to cupidity or bestiality, and propagated to whip up patriotism or prejudices – in short, the deployment and imposition of the baser types of cultural and social norms on a gullible people to turn them into a docile multitude – are all being clothed in the rhetoric of 'globalization' and 'liberalization'. At this rate, India will soon become a country where the moral sense will be dead, the social conscience calloused and the intellectual capacity confused and enfeebled.

Even a state like West Bengal, which had been ruled for more than twenty-five years by the Left, is no exception. The BJP accuses it of 'indoctrinating' the younger generation into Marxist ideas through school textbooks. But there is hardly any trace of Marxism in this generation. On the contrary, whatever little economic prosperity that has been brought about among sections of the rural masses by the Left Front government's land reforms, is being translated into practices that are shaped by the values of the 'yuppie-culture' which have been spawned by official policies that 'liberalize' the marriage of old bigotries with new superstitions.

The legally banned practice of dowry is being revived in the shape of demanding – and offering – scooters and television sets, apart from the

heavy cash to enable the bridegroom to bribe his way to some job. At the same time, Murali Manohar Joshi can find in Calcutta and other towns of the Marxist-ruled state a wide constituency for himself, where palmists and astrologers are having a field day, what with the educated youth and their parents consulting horoscopes before marriages, and disco-dancing Bengali boys and girls seeking a variety of rings to protect themselves from financial calamities! Togadia will be happy to find RSS *shakhas* and VHP-run schools in interior villages from where enough Bengali *Ram bhakis* are being recruited to implement the minority-bashing agenda of the BJP.

In such a situation, terms like 'socialism' – or even a liberal euphemism for a peaceful and humane social order called 'Gandhism' – are considered passé by our ruling elite. Stamped by the juggernaut of globalization, and abandoned by a people who prefer to follow the four C's, the Leftists find themselves in a state of confusion and helplessness. They wring their hands and bewail like Arjuna in the *Maushala-parva* (the 17th canto) of *Mahabharata*. After the death of his friend and charioteer Krishna, and the destruction of the Yadu dynasty, a brokenhearted and disconsolate Arjuna trudged his way to the *ashram* of Veda Vyasa and bemoaned his failure to protect his people from the invading plunderers who carried away the women:

'I couldn't defeat them even though I used my Gandiva. I lost the strength that I had in the past. I forgot in a moment all the divine weapons which I possessed. My armoury lay exhausted, and I couldn't see any longer the guide who led my chariot – that man who held a conch, a discus, a club and a lotus – who had always scorched my enemies. It was only

after this great man had scalded them that I could destroy them with my Gandiva... In his absence today, I feel extremely exhausted and dizzy.'

The charioteer of the Left movement – that grand old philosopher-activist called Karl Marx – seems to be receding into the background, like the disappearing Krishna in Arjuna's vision. But his words still ring a bell – ironically though, in a rather reverse direction. What he said about the rule of the bourgeoisie in his times has come to haunt the present generation of his followers with the fears about their own beliefs – 'All that is solid melts into air.'

The collapse of the socialist system in the Soviet Union has reinforced the fears and misgivings that had disturbed the Left intellectuals for decades – all through the period of Stalinist terror within Russia, the incursions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and later in Afghanistan. The other 'socialist' power, China, which at one time claimed to offer a superior alternative to the Soviet system, has turned out to be no better – what with the madness to which the Cultural Revolution descended and the internecine feuds within the Communist Party – leaving behind a record of brutal suppression of human rights. Under its new leadership today, instead of challenging the capitalist order, it is fast changing into the clothes of capitalism and reducing itself to a 'paper tiger' – the very term once used by its Chairman to dismiss US capitalism. Yet another ironical twist to the predictions made by great men!

Rubbing their hands in glee while watching a prostrated and paralyzed Left, the ruling think-tanks in Washington and New Delhi have now begun to write the obituary of socialism. But is it not premature? The past history of the unequal contest

3. Gurcharan Das, 'Ring in the Ringtones', *The Times of India*, 2 November 2003.

between capitalism and socialism has seen ups and downs. Like the phoenix, socialist ideas and movements have the peculiar habit of bouncing back from the ashes of their defeat, to haunt the capitalist order as the 'spectre' of the *Communist Manifesto*.

Capitalism with its built-in constraints cannot fully address the basic problems of inequality and poverty, whether in the developed or developing nations. Its political institutions, although offering democratic space for debate on these problems, remain crippled when trying to solve them. In its original home – the West – the economy is yet to recover from the bust following the financial market boom of the 1990s, and continues to reel under the weight of rising unemployment. To cap it all, a pile of corporate scandals headed by Enron and WorldCom has already besmirched the image of the much-touted 'new world order of liberalization.' It has infected the erstwhile socialist countries too, after their adoption of the capitalist free market system, which has 'liberalized' the rules for corrupt businessmen and mafia criminal gangs (who have replaced the former party apparatchiks and KGB), and withdrawn the social welfare measures that once helped the common citizens.

While watching these developments that increasingly remind the people of capitalism's inherent instability and inevitable tendency to create inequality, those Communists who still dream of reviving the old socialist system, rub their hands in glee in an 'I-told-you-so' gesture. But you can never make the ghosts of the past walk again. To paraphrase Marx's famous comment – the socialist system of the 20th century, which departed as a tragedy, can only end up as a farce if

its adherents insist on reviving it in its old form in the 21st century:

Can we think of new alternatives? Of late, I have noticed among some Left and liberal intellectuals a tendency to rekindle Gandhism as a possible alternative to capitalism and socialism. There are serious problems with such a proposition. First, some of the Gandhian ideas and practices do indeed come close to the humanitarian concerns of the ideology of socialism – emancipation and empowerment of the poor, and a moral commitment to carrying out that task by fighting against oppression and corruption.

This common ground of shared concerns was explored by Jayaprakash Narayan all through his life, and he tried out an experiment with his *Navnirman* movement based on the concept of Total Revolution in the late 1970s – a well-documented story which records its failure and degeneration through various stages ending up with its erstwhile leaders today occupying ministerial posts, and facing allegations of corruption and crime. Gandhism, like Marxist socialism, has been unable to stem the rot that corrupts its followers in a capitalist political system.

Besides, the Gandhian goal itself is clogged by built-in limitations. Unlike the futurist ideology of socialism, it harks back to a past and is constructed as a package of a rural Arcadia (*Ram rajya*) built on the traditional lines of the *Sanatana* Hindu religion, combined with social welfare measures expected to be initiated by the modern benevolent rich for the poor (under the concept of 'trusteeship'). In today's India, such a conciliatory message, apart from unwittingly lending itself to distortion and misuse by the proponents of Hindutva, sounds as utopian and irrelevant for the toiling

people as the homogenizing message given by Marx to the proletariat of his days: 'Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains.'

The structural changes in the contemporary economic system have divided the workers along hierarchical and other lines. Some among them have many things to lose (their jobs, TV sets, free quarters, and so on) if they dare to break their chains of servitude to the capitalist order. Similarly, Gandhi's rural audience too does not seem to have any use for his message. While a neo-rich farming class has developed enough stakes in the present socio-economic order and refuses to sacrifice even a fraction of its privileges to help the poor, the oppressed are increasingly seeking the alternative avenue of violent protest (e.g. the Naxalite actions in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand) to assert their rights.

This issue of the use of violence as opposed to non-violent tactics is a major problematic that disturbs and divides the various political and social activists who are engaged in devising alternative strategies to bring about a transformation in our society on the lines of equitable distribution of resources, social justice, and a democratic and secular political order. It is necessary to free the problematic from the conventional 'either-or' binary polarization.

The use of violence or non-violence as means or tactics cannot be regarded from a purist or absolutist point of view. The tactics vary from situation to situation, and depend on the options made available by the ruling order. Resort to violence is often determined by the compulsions (in the absence of non-violent options) imposed on the oppressed by the oppressors, on the weak by the powerful (whether in the national liberation

war in Vietnam, or the popular uprisings against the corrupt socialist governments in East Europe in the recent past, or against the US-backed oppressive Israeli regime in Palestine today – or even in the Gandhi-led Quit India movement).

The choice of violence or non-violence, as tactical consideration, cannot therefore be considered as a black and white, compartmentalized issue. To borrow Rosa Luxemburg's comment on the difference between legislative reform and revolution, violent and non-violent tactics are 'not different methods of historic development that can be picked out at pleasure from the counter of history, just as one chooses hot or cold sausages.'⁴

Let us come down to brass tacks. Basically the dispute is not over violent or non-violent tactics, but over the ideology that fashions those tactics. Neither the old Marxist ideology that visualized the dictatorship of the proletariat, nor the Gandhian ideology that dreamed of a mythical harmonious past, is workable – or desirable for that matter in the present circumstances.

But socialism – by whatever term you may describe its essence – still remains valid. A system that assures equitable distribution of resources and income, social justice for all, respect for democracy, secular values and human rights – remains the best bet for the majority of our people. But it is necessary to recognize and establish socialism as a moral concept, not a mere ideology on which you build a workable system. Only that recognition might help the remoulding of the ideology of socialism in accordance with the changing needs of society and its people.

4. Rosa Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution* (1900). Reprint: Colombo, 1969, p. 59.

In this respect socialism – as a moral concept – has an edge over capitalism which is just a functional tool for mere accumulation of wealth. If socialism is to be established as a moral concept, its followers will have to take up the challenge of reversing the course of the 'revolution of selfishness' that has overtaken our people under the canopy of the capitalist free market, by attempting to transform the individual who is the main actor in the history of change.

At the same time, socialism should not be looked upon as a historically determined eventuality (as envisaged by orthodox Marxism), just as the Hindu Sangh Parivar or the Islamic fundamentalists visualize a divinely ordained Ramrajya or Dar-ul Islam. Socialism should rather be considered as a goal to be achieved in stages, through a variety of forms of combat (both armed and non-violent) marked by voluntary participation of the poor and the underprivileged, through incorporation of the various new struggles that are emerging – environmental, feminist, ethnic among others.

Socialism in India today stands on the shores of a sea of possibilities – popular movements in the unorganized sector, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the struggles of fish workers in the coastal areas, the Naxalite movement, the women's struggles for access to resources, the human rights and peace movements, new alliances like the Bharat Jan Andolan and Jan Sangharsh Morcha. All these struggles, however heroic, suffer from the lack of a coherent ideology and a binding organizational structure that can unitedly challenge the global order that is being imposed on our people. They are awaiting a new leadership. It is in the tangled stems and branches and twigs of these movements that the modern Arjuna would have to seek his Gandiva.



In life, in death

RANABIR SAMADDAR

MY purpose here is to present a few hypotheses on one of the great questions of our time, the arrangement of power and rights in life and in death. I shall argue that the interface of human rights and humanitarianism presents a strategic game between life and death, between power and rights. Further, what is at stake is not a choice between human rights and humanitarianism or an option of combining these two, but nothing less than the battle around how we shall look at life and death, by which I mean power over life and power over death, the right of life and right of death. This lies at the heart of most conflicts around us today.

* Based on a presentation at a Wiscomp workshop on conflict transformation.

What can be learned from the interaction between human rights monitoring, humanitarian assistance and conflict?

Let us begin with the issue of the interaction between human rights monitoring and humanitarian assistance in conflict. While human rights is politics and humanitarian assistance 'civic activities', the eventual culmination of conflict is war. War is conquest or a battle to defeat the conqueror; it is politics by other means. In order to understand the complexity, we must bid farewell to the theory of sovereignty which resided in the states (roughly in equal measure) or those who controlled the states; that sovereignty meant the right to wage war, the

right to inflict death on the ultimate offender, and imposed the duty to protect life.

International laws are based on this recognition; laws of war and peace derive from an acknowledgement of this fact and the recognition of the necessity to regulate this situation of equality. But, in posing this question, we are visualising a situation where this right has been challenged, de-anchored from its habitual source that is sovereignty, because the power of empire has redefined sovereignty in a way where human rights monitoring and humanitarian assistance no longer remain issues of right of life and death but become mere expressions of power.

In such a situation the challenge is: how to monitor human rights violations during war which is itself a violation of human rights, or decide how humanitarian assistance can be provided. In other words, since war has redefined conditions of the right of life and death, the resultant politics becomes the politics of war, a continuation of war by other means. In effect we face a reversal of the situation with a paradigmatic shift from the politics of sovereignty to the politics of empire.

Human rights and humanitarian assistance were the markers of the politics of sovereignty in two different forms, both signifying the right and power of life and death. Now, with the emergence of a new empire, the return of colonial wars and an extreme right wing form of globalization waging resource wars, that right of life and death has become outdated. These are now tickets of imperial power, simply its functional variables. Under these altered conditions, when the right of life and right to protect life are governed by power of death, human rights can only be monitored (not ensured)

and humanitarian assistance only partially given.

For example, the 1991 Iraq war was a decade long war, not less-than-a month war as portrayed by the media, in which many actors played aggressors or silent spectators. The actors included global media giants who bayed for Iraqi blood, and even the UN Security Council which imposed a strict economic blockade on the country and disarmed it completely, thereby rendering Iraq defenceless in the face of impending aggression. The January–February 1991 war followed the UN Security Council Resolution 687, authorizing ‘all necessary means’ to obtain an unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

The story of the 1991 Gulf War is well-known and does not bear repetition. It is useful, however, to recall the indiscriminate carnage towards the end of the war when Iraqi forces were withdrawing from Kuwait following

**The various references to Iraq are all drawn from an open letter from 11 South Asian peace and human rights activists to Irene Khan, Secretary General, Amnesty International, titled, ‘Let us take steps to set up an independent international war crimes tribunal on Iraq,’ 17 April 2003. On details of the destruction, see the two letters issued by the group. For instance, the letter also cites the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Age*, which claimed that the coalition forces dropped 40,000 pounds of explosives and napalm bombs over Safwan Hill near Basra to beat the Iraqi resistance. The US authorities have denied this. They have also used bunker buster bombs, 5,000-pound explosives, which are designed to penetrate up to 6 metres of concrete or 30 meters of earth before exploding. These bombs have also been used in the urban areas of Baghdad. Former Nobel Peace Prize nominee Helen Caldicott said that the casing of bunker busters was made of uranium 238, depleted uranium, or DU. The coalition forces remain unapologetic about the extensive use of DU tipped anti-tank shells which burn through tank armour, igniting the vehicle. After exploding, 70 per cent of the shell is said to vaporize into tiny particles and is carried by the wind. www.safhr.org

Moscow’s 24 February 1991 peace plan which Iraq had accepted. On 26 February 1991, as the long Iraqi convoy was moving towards Basra along Highway 80, the coalition forces launched a combined ground and air offensive and hit both ends with heavy explosives. The slaughter continued for the next 40 hours with petrol tankers and tanks exploding in cascades of red flame amidst figures of soldiers perishing like little ants.

The air campaign alone was responsible for 32,000 deaths and the total Iraqi casualties added up to 62,000. The coalition forces reportedly dropped a total of 99,000 to 140,000 tons of explosives – equivalent of five to seven nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima.

The 1991 war also witnessed a near total destruction of Iraq’s civilian infrastructure, including electric power stations, irrigation facilities and water and sewage treatment plants. It was estimated that Iraq needed US \$22 billion to repair the civilian infrastructure. Then came the burden of war reparation to be paid out of the oil for food programme – a UN humanitarian programme to save life in conditions of slow, gradual and sure death. This continued for the next ten years while shadowy men like Wolfowitz and a dozen or so lobbyists pressed the case for war on Iraq.

Where would human rights monitoring begin in this case? Will it monitor the inhuman nature of humanitarian assistance that is conditioned by the appearance of the ‘New Empire’? Will it probe at the margins, the vanishing margin between war (the right of death) and the deployment of humanitarian strategy (the right of life), reducing it to a matter of power of life and death?

What are the ways in which human rights and humanitarian

assistance groups can coordinate their work to enhance the effectiveness of their intervention?

The reality we are talking of here is the divide between human rights and humanitarianism, the near impossibility of coordinating the two, the reality of their coexistence, and the simulated acts of life and death in this relationship. Human rights speak of the rights of the *people*, humanitarianism speaks of *population* – the target to be fed, clothed, sheltered, maintained and protected.

There are at least a couple of anomalies to be noted: first, war is a suspension of rights. *Inter arma silent leges* – in times of war laws are silent. A right against war may be claimed, but it demands uncoupling two connected realities – rights and power in life and death. A claim may be made that it is a war to establish rights, yet I doubt if one can speak of rights in the time of war. Rights come after the war. That is how people figure in this scenario. On the other hand, populations may be somewhat protected from the destruction of war, which is what humanitarian activities are – acts of mercy, hospitality and care. These are ethical acts – the techniques of self in relating to other selves. They are essentially private, that is truly public or non-state.

Organisations of care and charity have always emerged in human societies, at times encouraged by royalty, emperors, kings, princes, churches, mosques and temples, but as interventions they were non-state. Today, in the condition of modernity these organisations are akin to states or huge corporations; in their mode of functioning they reveal the exact relation between care and power. In this metamorphosis we can see two aspects: one, from humanitarian acts to humanitarianism, which is an ideo-

logy (from sentiment to doctrine); and second, care as an arm of power. As Dostoyevsky remarked, we love humanity but we hate human beings.

The question that we need to think through is: how can we, perched as we are on these two planks of human rights and humanitarian acts, turn them into acts of justice that will not be bound by the closure caused by the self-foundation of law? In other words, if the laws of war are a fallacy (beyond a point), if neither the right of life nor the right to save life can escape the closure or the aporia, what are the conditions under which such interventions become possible and help make life a sign of justice? Can we think of a politics that can anchor the issue of conditions of life to justice?

How should such groups and other intermediaries address the ‘unintended consequences of their interventions’?

We must work rigorously to understand what the consequences have been in the past. There is no other way to approach the question. Foucault once pointed out that one of the greatest social security programmes of the modern era was planned at a time when one of the most terrifying mass murders was being enacted. The French Revolution gives the signal for the great national wars of our days, involving national armies and meeting their conclusion or their climax in huge mass slaughters. A similar phenomenon can be witnessed during the Second World War. In all history it would be hard to find such butchery as in World War II. Yet it was precisely this period, this moment, when the great welfare, public health and medical assistance programmes were instigated. The Beveridge programme was, if not conceived, at least published at this very moment. One could symbolize such coincidence by a

slogan: ‘Go get slaughtered and we promise you a long and pleasant life. Life insurance is connected with a death command’ (cf. *The Political Technology of Individuals*).

If we know what the intended consequences were or are, it is possible to think of the other consequences. A rigorous study of the history or the histories of care is needed. Take the history of the birth of the Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda, the life of Florence Nightingale, the activities of Norman Bethune, the Kotnis Medical Mission to China, the work of the People’s Relief Committee in the Bengal Famine, and the history of the Edhi Foundation in Karachi. There are three aspects to be noted: its character as protest, its links to politics, and finally its subsequent development marked by the game of care and power. It is important to see the diverse and complex aspects – the protest against death, the normalisation of death, and the disciplinary power of the language of care.

In the wake of concerns relating to human rights violations is neutrality possible? What ethical questions emerge from the focus on impartiality in conflict? Does neutrality suggest that aid workers and other intermediaries run the risk of becoming instruments of social control rather than social transformation?

I have already answered a part of the question earlier, but there are other reflections as well. The question of neutrality is being posed at a time when many regimes, mostly the imperial regime, have been able to wage wars killing countless people as ‘managers of life and survival.’ Once this logic is firmly established, the idea is to kill as few people as possible to assure many that their lives would be spared. Consider therefore the advances in the technology of killing

– targeted killing. This does not necessarily mean fewer deaths, but that a war, such as the Iraq war, will now be two wars simultaneously – virtual war and real war. In the real war slaughtering men and women will continue; in the virtual war there will be targeted killing, fewer killings, lower body count, a simulated situation where neutrality becomes increasingly possible.

No longer will neutrality (as the Anglo-French neutrality in the Spanish Civil War) cause outrage; states would now find it possible to defy the massive public outrage as we witnessed throughout the globe and support the punishment of a recalcitrant state, even to the point of the destruction of the country. But we can also see a different development – as control over life grows, the necessity to kill becomes less a form of juridical punishment; similarly as more countries acquiesce to the most extreme right wing form of globalisation, the necessity to punish will reduce. Controlling the bodies, physically regulating the lives of millions – an ever present imperial dream – is now more than ever closer to realisation.

With satellites, precision bombing, television, micro-inch mapping, genetically modified food, drug-food-clothing-chains, monitoring of small economies, and much more – the imperial dream of controlling millions of people, turning them into population groups to be administered, is becoming an exciting reality for the empire. One may remain neutral or non-neutral – the agenda of neutrality is becoming irrelevant – because right in front of our eyes, ethics and law are adjusting themselves to the new type of war being evolved by the empire. Thus, the assassination of leaders (decapitation), incarceration (Guantanamo Bay prison), manipulation of media and

the info-war (CNN or Fox News style mafia operation), withholding food supply from reaching the garrisoned town/country thus killing children, the weak and infirm (economic blockade), asphyxiation and mass terrorisation (cluster bombs and daisy bombing) – all that the laws of war seek to prohibit have been granted moral and legal sanction.

The question is no longer one of rights and care, but resistance politics in defence of life at every level unconnected to the power of death. The agenda of humanitarian aid must be questioned – aid under what conditions, reaching whom, given by whom, and reaching when? In this situation, when the right to life is linked to the power of death, whose humanitarianism is it anyway? When efforts to give life-masks to groups of human beings on the verge of death meet the reality of power, that is the moment of truth: the ultimate compromise of rights with power, of life with death.

Take again the noblest principles of impartiality in recent times. The Amnesty International made ten demands on the combatants on 18 March 2003 as the attack on Iraq was to begin. The demands were: Do not attack civilians; do not use weapons that kill and maim indiscriminately; treat civilian detainees fairly and humanely; treat combatants according to the Geneva Conventions; prioritise the safety and needs of the Iraqi people; protect and help refugees and the internally displaced; bring to justice perpetrators of crimes under international law; allow independent investigation of their conduct; deploy human rights monitors throughout Iraq as soon as practicable; support the UN's humanitarian and human rights work. These are the noblest principles of neutrality. But they also reflect the tension between humanitarian laws,

called the laws of war, and the human rights law they mirror.

The first six demands derive from international humanitarian law, with distinction and proportionality as the guiding principles with the aim to 'restrain the destructive force of war even while recognizing its inexorable necessities.' Obviously, it will be difficult to assess whether or not and to what extent these principles of distinction and proportionality were adhered to until the parties involved in the war (as Amnesty's demands 8 and 9 show) submit to independent investigation of their conduct and permit human rights monitors in the terrain of their operations. But under conditions of a victor's justice, how would the primary evidence of violations of the principles of proportionality, distinction and accountability be judged?

The implication is that unlike the traditional practice of securing reparation by the victorious power from the vanquished (which is what the food for oil programme was), we need a process of reparation which takes into account the cost of damages, including the ongoing devastation and its impact on the quality of life because of the way the war has been conducted by the victorious party. In such circumstances, the issue of reparation is linked to human lives, indeed the basic right to life. But I am not aware, judging the trajectory of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and the contrasting history of colonial wars, plunder, murders and loot, that such law can ever agree on either a computation of the overall damage or the need for securing reparation from the victorious party.

Alternatively, take the case of suicide bombings. The distinction between combatants and non-combatants assumes obscure dimensions in the context of resistance against total aggres-

sion when combatants and civilians together mobilise in the war against an invasion. How will human rights law and humanitarian law react to 'resistance', even if it manifests itself in such desperate and suicidal acts as the British people would have taken recourse to had Nazi German troops crossed the English Channel in 1944? Shall we recall the American Revolution as perfidious because its harbingers had encouraged the participants to sneak up to the British military formations and shoot at them surreptitiously? It is time we rethink the laws to bring them into conformity with the current reality of colonial and neo-colonial wars of aggression and conquest.

How do we work for peace and raise concerns relating to human rights? How do we achieve peace with justice?

Let us maintain our critical approach in reflecting on the question. Of course, we are all for peace, because we think it serves our desire for justice. But for this, we must remember that peace is war by other means. Therefore, peace is also contentious politics; behind the innocent tale of peace are the suppressed stories of contention and war. This is true of all varieties of peace – 'social peace' that the industrialists and neo-liberals want; 'peace after state-formation' that the leaders of both India and Pakistan wanted in their respective countries in the late forties after the British handed them the power to rule; 'peace after an accord' when the state wants to disarm the rebels; and, of course, 'peace when the night has settled on the killing field', that is conqueror's peace, for instance the return of peace in Iraq.

What will be transformed in the course of conflict depends therefore on this life-death game. We can ask: will conflict be transformed into something else? Or, will conflict transform

others, everything around it? As the saying goes, what is cooked is not decided in the kitchen but outside. Similarly, the destiny of peace will not be decided in the arena of peace, but elsewhere – that is where we need a new argument for justice.

Take the issue of disarmament, that is, disarming the defeated. As we know, disarmament means arms control. The practice of negotiating arms control among sovereign nations in international forums in peace-time with a view to making the agreed measures applicable to all nations, began a century ago with the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, both held at the initiative of Russia, then lagging behind in the European arms race. 188 delegates from 26 countries participated in the first conference; 256 delegates from 44 countries participated in the second.

The goals of disarmament remained distant. Proposals for limiting the calibre of naval guns, the thickness of armour-plate and the velocity of projectiles were rejected. There was no agreement on limiting the number of the armed forces personnel and war budgets, though certain types of weapons such as asphyxiating gases, expanding bullets, or submarine contact mines were prohibited or use restricted. The territory of a neutral country was declared non-violable and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the predecessor to the International Court of Justice, was established.

I do not know how the NGO-sponsored Hague meet of 1999 wrestled with the one-century old ghost when it adopted 'An Agenda for Peace and Justice' dealing with the root causes of war, international humanitarian and human rights laws and institutions, prevention, resolution and transformation of violent conflicts,

and disarmament and human security. But what we do know is that in less than ten years of the Second Hague meet (1907), the massacres of World War I started; the massacres then gave way to the Treaty of Versailles that disarmed Germany, dissolved its general staff, allowed only a token navy, ordered demilitarisation of the Rhine zone on the East, and yet in twenty years mass murders commenced again.

The annual publication of *Armament Year Book* by the League from 1924, attempts by the permanent advisory commission of the League to regulate the arms trade and production beginning with The Brussels Act of 1890 (controlling the production and supply firearms and ammunition to parts of Africa), the 1924 Geneva Protocol and the 1925 Geneva Convention on the arms trade, and finally the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 leading upto the 1932 Disarmament Conference, all ended with a renewed clash of arms marked by new weaponry. Even as our humanitarian instincts impel us to respond to the calibrated calls on weapons of mass destruction, outlawing of landmines and so on, we must also remember this 'curious history'.

'The ICRC considers a total ban on the production, export and use of anti-personnel mines to be the only effective solution to the humanitarian catastrophe they have caused' (ICRC, 1995). Yet, such a solution cannot hold in the absence of measures for reducing the disparity of arms, eradicating manufacture of weapons of mass destruction by the empire; and without an end to the present polarity we see in warfare – the massively organised warfare of the empire and the recolonisers, and the fragmented wars everywhere.

It needs to be re-emphasised that noble humanitarian aims cannot be

realised by claiming that international humanitarian law has developed quite independently from human rights law. In the light of our experience, it is time to think whether it is realistic to claim that by not focusing on violations of human rights but instead on the need to act in a crisis situation, ‘a neutral and independent intermediary can find practical solutions for humanitarian problems’ (ICRC n.d.), or that humanitarian law can protect human rights (for instance, through visits to prisons and detention camps thus preventing disappearances, or through providing essential supplies thereby promoting the right to life).

Living and letting others live is no innocent act. All social and political contracts are the results of war; humanitarian law is no exception insofar as it has the nature of a contract. The duration of its imposition is defined as the time of peace, which ends with new wars requiring new contracts. We have to keep in mind the permanence of wars in order to forge new practices of human rights, justice and peace. An ideal of justice has to link, not de-link the two.

Let me conclude with reflections on the rules governing the conduct of hostilities in internal armed conflicts – the distinction between combatants and civilians, immunity of civilian population, prohibition of superfluous injury, prohibition of perfidy, respect for and protection of medical and religious personnel and of medical units and transport, prohibition of attacks on dwellings and other installations used only by civilian population, or precautionary measures in attack, plus the customary rules on chemical and biological weapons, poison, mines and incendiary weapons.

Take the controversy around Common Article 3: What defines

‘internal armed conflict’? That is not international – is that enough? Or is ambiguity an advantage, which a humanitarian agency like the ICRC believes, because ambiguity allows efforts to push the threshold of application? We have of course determinants of what constitutes an ‘armed conflict’ (cf *The Law of Internal Armed Conflict* by Lindsay Moir), but note here the politics of recognition. Recognition, legal recognition of ‘the party in revolt’ or ‘the insurgents’ depends on possession of ‘an organised military force, an authority responsible for its acts, acting within a determinate territory.’ Also on the *de jure* government recognising ‘the insurgents as belligerents,’ ‘the insurgents (having) an organisation purporting to have the characteristics of a state,’ and so on.

In all these, we see state logic reproducing itself at every level, alongside a refusal to admit that the phenomenon of revolt constitutes a paradox – it is both a reproduction of the old form against which it rises even as it carries new elements not associated with the old state. The determinants mentioned try to understand insurgency in the language of state law, therefore subordinate them to state logic, while refusing to admit that the party in revolt represents a ‘dangerous supplement’. The law of internal armed conflict therefore fails. The politics of war can be tamed not by the laws of war but by a politics of dialogue, of which one expression can be legal pluralism.

To carry forward the work of justice in the shadow of war we need to take war in all seriousness. I am not referring to the cyclical theory of war and peace. My plea is for a critical politics of justice that will make us aware of the script of modern war detailing various roles, including the ones that

human rights and humanitarianism will play in the event. Francois Bernard, the architect of an astonishing website on globalisation, draws attention to the fact that modern imperial wars are like political blockbusters: the last war we witnessed gripped to our seats was not ‘like a film’, but was precisely *a film*, down to the last detail.

Drawing inspiration from the cinematographic industry, the script of war realises, in advance, all its plans and ventures. That is why in modern imperial war the script is so sacred and inviolable, dictating to everyone associated with the war, including human rights and humanitarian groups, the role/s to play. The casting, technical and financial means of the cinematic war are meticulously planned to ensure an exceptional success long before the war is launched. War, literally, cannot be waged *without cinema*, without the cinema effectively becoming the paradigm of the ongoing war which most imagine as ‘real’, while it is only a mirror of its cinematographic being. No wonder, the attempt is to gain complete control over all channels; only then can the magical marketing wand erase even the most trivial scripting, casting and directing errors. The one crucial requirement is that there has to be film in the reel, sound bytes and abundant images, so that expert mixers can continuously dish it out to consumers with ever-weakening critical faculties.

How does one disturb such a script? By refusing to play given roles, by shifting our lenses a little, by showing discomfort with the chairs we are given, by asking time and again, ‘where do rights come from?’ From law or from contentious politics – that sense of justice, that extra, that remainder, which cannot be consumed by the regime of law?

The many faces of nationalism

NANDITA HAKSAR

You want proof that the sun exists, so you stay up/All night talking about it. Finally you sleep/As the sun comes up.

Jelaluddin Balkhi 'Rumi'

ON 13 December 2001, the entire country watched the attack on the Indian Parliament on their TV screens. We all saw the bloodied faces of the five attackers killed by our security forces. The country went into a state of shock. No one questioned the government's story that the attack was the handiwork of Pakistan-based terrorists belonging to the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. The media, in a willing suspension of disbelief, published whatever the police and investigating agencies put out.

The police completed its entire investigation in a record time of one week and quickly arrested four people – three Kashmiri men and a Sikh woman – for helping the five deceased attackers. The main accused, Mohammad Afzal, from the start cooperated with the police and led them to the hide-outs of the five attackers and the shops from where they had purchased mobile phones, cash cards and chemicals for making bombs. He also confessed to being a part of the conspiracy.

The Special Branch organised a press conference on 20 December at the Lodhi Road Police Station and produced Mohammad Afzal before the national media. In full view of the nation, Afzal confessed to being a part of the conspiracy to attack the Parliament. One effect of this 'media trial' was that the public no longer felt the need for a 'judicial trial'. Since everyone in the country knew who had attacked our Parliament, where was the need for formal proof.

The mediatrial also served a political purpose. The government stood vindicated in the world arena with the international community finally forced to admit that India was a victim of cross-border terrorism. Troops were amassed on the India-Pakistan border, war seemed imminent and there was even talk of nuclear bombs.

In the midst of this war against terrorism, the government arranged a joint meeting of the two Houses of Parliament to pass the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It would require rare courage for anyone to question the efficacy of POTA a few weeks after the attack on Parliament. It would be blatantly anti-national and unpatrio-

tic. And thus India joined the war against terrorism.

In the Delhi University the 'ultranationalist' forces demanded that the services of S.A.R. Geelani, a lecturer at Zakir Hussain College and one of the four accused of being a part of the conspiracy to attack the Parliament, be terminated. They said there was no need to wait for the trial to begin. After all, even respectable newspapers had carried screaming tabloid style headlines that Geelani had confessed to being a part of the conspiracy. Besides, he was a Kashmiri Muslim and taught Arabic. What more proof could anyone want of his complicity in the conspiracy?

The media of course did not carry any report of the fact that despite use of torture by the police to extort a confession, Geelani had refused to admit to his guilt. No one questioned the Special Branch's blatantly false claims that Geelani had made a confession.

In the midst of this environment of prejudice and hatred, a group of Zakir Hussain College teachers worked quietly but consistently to oppose the forces of fascism and prevent Geelani's services from being terminated. Some Delhi University teachers came together to address issues arising out of Geelani's trial. A few visited Geelani in jail, even though they did not know him personally. Others fought long and hard to win support of the teachers unions. Unfortunately, the unions even hesitated to issue a statement demanding a fair trial for a member accused of a terrorist act.

There was a small group of citizens, including veteran socialists, civil liberties activists and democratic Indians who were deeply concerned over the fact that the new anti-terrorist law made it virtually impossible for any accused to prove his innocence. And

they believed Geelani when he said he was innocent.

The challenge before this small but committed group of Indian citizens was how to turn public opinion – to make people aware of the dangers of convicting people merely on the basis of police suspicion, without a fair trial, and to create a climate where the life and liberty of a fellow citizen could not be sacrificed at the altar of national chauvinism. This appeared an impossible task even when some of the country's most prominent citizens formed themselves into the All India Committee for the Defence of S.A.R. Geelani.

We will leave it to history to judge whether Geelani and the other three accused were given a fair trial in the designated court. In the defence committee's view the judge, S.N. Dhingra, made no effort to mask his prejudice, forcing teachers of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University to write an open letter to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to ensure a fair trial for Geelani.

The designated court sentenced Geelani and two of his co-accused to death even as Navjot was given five years. A mob burst crackers outside the courtroom to celebrate the event. The members of the Special Branch, in pressed suits and polished shoes, could not stop smiling; they had become national heroes.

At the time it seemed virtually certain that an innocent citizen would hang. Could there be any greater shame for a country that called itself the largest democracy in the world? The trial exposed how easily patriotism could be twisted to serve the needs of those who wanted fascism to triumph in this country, my country.

I felt a deep, burning shame when I heard how members of the Special Branch had urinated on Afzal and

Shaukat, the lower court judge mocked the pregnant Navjot, and the jail authorities prevented Geelani from offering Namaz last Id. What greater proof of our dehumanization than when a man condemned to death is denied even his right to worship. Surprisingly, the National Human Rights Commission did not react. The media indulged in defamation with impunity, throwing all journalistic ethics to the wind. Political parties committed to democratic and secular values of our Constitution did not raise their voice against the denial of fair trial to the four accused; they did not react even when an attempt was made on Geelani's life in the jail. All this in the name of nationalism.

Geelani heard the death sentence on 18 December 2001. When asked for his reaction, he responded quietly, calmly, with great dignity and political clarity: 'By convicting innocents you cannot suppress feelings. Peace comes with justice. Without justice there will be no democracy. It is Indian democracy that is under threat.'

The death sentence for Geelani shocked the people in Kashmir and they declared a *bandh* for three days. Hundreds in Kashmir sent postcards to the Home Minister and the National Human Rights Commission demanding a fair trial for Geelani and the other three accused, insisting that if only Geelani got a fair trial he would be acquitted. In the rest of the country too people demanded a fair trial, even if ambivalent about Geelani's innocence.

The media neither supported this campaign nor reported on its growing momentum. For them it was not news that more than 50,000 postcards had been sent from right across the country demanding a fair trial. Apart from the three universities in Delhi, we got support from the university commu-

nity in West Bengal. The All Bengal University Teachers Association, representing nine universities, passed a resolution in Geelani's support. With the help of our website, pamphlets, posters, meetings and alternative media in regional languages we reached more than a hundred thousand people. The campaign also got the support of individuals and organizations abroad – from Amnesty International to Noam Chomsky.

The fact that Ram Jethmalani, senior counsel and former Union Law Minister, offered to defend Geelani *pro bono* greatly boosted our campaign. Ram Jethmalani argued with passion and conviction. He told the High Court judges hearing the case that Geelani did not get even a moment's fair trial in the lower court, that he had taken up the case because he was morally convinced that Geelani was innocent and there was no evidence against him.

The campaign for Geelani's release, along with Ram Jethmalani's passionate defence, succeeded in getting Geelani's acquittal.

The acquittal of the 34 year old Delhi University lecturer was hailed as a triumph of Indian democracy. Newspapers across the country carried editorials proclaiming that justice had been done. For some the judgement reflected the competence and independence of our judiciary. Others, who had lost hope in Indian secularism in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots and the rising tide of communal prejudice, felt that the judgement of the Delhi High Court had vindicated their faith in Indian secularism. Still others felt that the judgement reflected the vibrancy of our democratic institutions.

There were those who read the news of the acquittal with an indescribable happiness, similar to the one when we encounter a miracle. Friends

who had lost touch with me for more than 15 years called to express their joy. In a manner of speaking, the judgement is a miracle. How many of us really believe that a Kashmiri Muslim sentenced to death for conspiring to attack the Indian Parliament can be acquitted, even if absolutely innocent?

And then our 'patriotic' celebration seemed to have been abruptly sullied by a statement made by Geelani at a press conference immediately after his release from jail. Instead of praising Indian democracy, or at least the judiciary, he expressed concern about the politicization of our courts and the criminalization of the police. Also that a lasting solution to the Kashmir conflict could emerge if only the aspirations of the people of Kashmir were taken into account. He added that he wanted to help other prisoners, especially the Kashmiris in Tihar jail, who had been denied a fair trial.

It is true that a few thought Geelani's statement reflected a rare courage. Even at the press conference his colleagues, including senior professors, endorsed his statement by clapping and cheering. But there were many others who felt he was being rash and foolhardy by making such statements, especially since the police had already announced that they would appeal to the Supreme Court against his acquittal. Geelani's supporters advised caution and self-restraint. Other friends advised him to return to normal life, begin teaching and resume research.

Many who advised caution were worried not only about Geelani's personal safety but that the Kashmiris may draw wrong conclusions from his statement. Kuldeep Nayar, one-time Emergency victim and a prominent voice of democratic India, reflects this opinion. Writing in *The Indian Express* on 4 November 2003, Nayar

castigated Geelani: 'For Geelani to mix the Kashmir question with the attack is to politicize a heinous crime... I hope Geelani's statement does not become grist for the propaganda mills. A favourable ground for talks between Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and the Hurriyat is being prepared.'

He added that Geelani's 'only claim to fame was the police case against him which it could not prove in the court.' Such 'democratic minded' Indians hope that the people in Kashmir would see Geelani's acquittal as a testimony of the democratic credentials of our country. They think that the Kashmiris will forget their history and bitter experience of the past decades only because a High Court acquitted an innocent Kashmiri against whom there was not an iota of evidence in the first place and who had been condemned to death by a POTA court.

It is undeniable that the two High Court judges who acquitted Geelani, Justice Usha Mehra and Pradeep Nandrajog, showed rare courage and integrity. The acquittal of Navjot was simpler because there is no constituency that could make political capital out of her release. But we need to take a closer look at the High Court judgement in order to analyze how far it helped open up space for future democratic struggles for fair trial of accused in cases of terrorism.

The judgement by Justice Pradeep Nandrajog raises many vital questions. The most important relates to the role of media trials. The judge has held that media trials do not vitiate the trial itself because, unlike with a lay jury, propaganda or adverse publicity does not influence professional judges. In this he seems to echo the Supreme Court judgement in the Zee News case. Therein, the defence lawyers for the Parliament accused had managed a stay from the High Court

restraining the broadcasting of a Zee TV film titled December 13. Though the film claimed to be based on the chargesheet, it in fact made allegations against Geelani that went far beyond the prosecution case. The Supreme Court, however, vacated the stay on grounds that judges could not be influenced. It failed to appreciate how such films are responsible for creating a climate of fear and mistrust. Today, even post acquittal, Geelani cannot get a house on rent. His children find it hard to lead normal lives.

Though Justice Nandrajog was bound by the Supreme Court judgement on the question of what effect media trials have on judges, there was also the question of police organizing media conferences. The judge made observations against the practice of allowing the media to interview the accused persons when they are in police custody under orders of the court. But neither did he lay down any guidelines, nor did he pass any strictures against the policemen who organized the press conference and forced Afzal to incriminate himself in full view of the national media. The judge did not even reprimand the senior officers who denied any knowledge of the press conference in the court, on oath.

The 392-page judgement contains many observations on the disturbing trends in police investigation. The judge asked whether there was a breach of statutory safeguards during investigation? If yes, the consequences thereof? After a detailed examination of the facts, the judge found that the 'prosecution stood discredited qua the time of arrest of the accused, S.A.R. Geelani.' He also found that the arrest memos had been forged. The police forged documents, lied on oath, failed to follow even basic rules of criminal procedure and

violated the letter and spirit of the Indian Constitution. Despite all this, the Delhi High Court failed to pass any strictures against the police officers of the Special Branch.

Perhaps the weakest part of the judgement is that the judge did not make any adverse observations against the Designated Judge, S.N. Dhingra who showed his hostility and prejudice against the accused by routinely denying their counsel the right to cross-examine the prosecution witnesses. Further, he behaved like the prosecution by cross-examining defence witnesses and the accused when they gave their statements to the court.

At best the High Court has created only partial space for further struggles to protect people who are similarly framed. It does not restrain the media from irresponsible reporting, nor the police from using the media in the war against terrorism, unmindful that in the process the police acquire powers without being accountable. They seem to have the power to violate rules, regulations, procedures, laws and even the Constitution—with impunity. The media failed to point out that one of the officers in charge of the investigation is accused of being involved in false encounter deaths in Delhi and another is in Tihar jail on corruption charges. If such policemen have power of life and death over citizens, the future of our democracy is bleak indeed.

Even those who campaigned for Geelani's acquittal are now hesitant to address the uncomfortable questions which have arisen in the course of the trial of the four accused of conspiring to attack the Parliament, questions which have a bearing on our future as a democratic country. We knew that the trial would raise such questions, which is what prompted us to form the All India Defence Committee for

S.A.R. Geelani. We were aware of defending more than the civil liberties of an individual citizen. We were expressing our concern about the erosion of civil liberties in the name of national security and war against terrorism.

The acquittal has raised even more questions, but few seem to be willing to publicly debate them. It seems that we are satisfied that the Delhi High Court has redeemed our faith in the judicial process, that we should not expect anything more from this system. Rather, we should just celebrate the miracle and Geelani should get back to normal life.

Has our society become so dehumanized as to lose its capacity to feel moral outrage for a human being who has been wronged? I have watched Geelani right from the time he stepped out of the jail gates. He has not had a minute's reprieve. The media has not stopped vilifying him. Even when he sent a rejoinder, at least one paper refused to publish it and an advertisement had to be inserted giving Geelani's clarification. He is expected to step out from months of solitary confinement where he was denied access to books, walk into class and start teaching for three to four hours every day.

In addition he must look for a new house to rent and deal with the fear and insecurity afflicting his children. They had spent the past two years regularly visiting him in jail, saw him in handcuffs in the court, and they cannot forget the sight of their father at the police station on the night of 14 December 2001. True, never for a minute did they lose hope of his ultimate release. Perhaps children have an inherent belief in justice, in the ultimate victory of good over evil. They waited for the nightmare to end as suddenly as it had begun. But the nightmare has not ended. They do not know why their beloved Abu was wrongfully arrested

and can never be sure that it might not happen again – to him or to someone else they love.

The High Court judgement will not restore the lost childhood of Geelani's children; nor will it restore the faith of other Kashmiris in Indian democracy. As much as the judgement reflects the integrity of two judges, it also reflects the success of our campaign which proves that there is democratic space for struggle in our country. The struggle opened up spaces for us to expose the injustice in one particular incident. But how many innocent Kashmiris languishing in jail can expect such campaigns in their support? How many will be defended by lawyers of the calibre of Ram Jethmalani?

It would only be self-delusion to expect the Kashmiri people to be bowled over by Indian democracy merely because the judges acquitted one innocent Kashmiri after keeping him in death row for nearly a year. However, perhaps our campaign may persuade some Kashmiris that Indians are willing to fight against human rights violations even in the midst of the war against terrorism. But how many of us are willing to confront the real problem, the question of the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people? Even Geelani's mild statement that the aspirations of the Kashmiri people must be taken into account if we want a resolution to the conflict aroused so much hatred.

Of course we have a right to celebrate Geelani's acquittal. It deserves to be celebrated for what it is: a successful struggle for justice in rather difficult times. But the struggle is far from complete, the task ahead is even more difficult than ensuring a fair trial for one individual. Our task is to create a political climate where all issues, including the demand for self-determination in Kashmir, can be fairly dis-

cussed. The struggle for a fair trial is a part of that struggle.

The state has not given up its attempts to convict Geelani. The media has not stopped its vilification campaign. It is true the *Hindustan Times* in its editorial of 31 October 2003 admitted: 'When the Delhi Police announced that they had come across vital evidence beyond doubt Geelani was guilty, many including this paper, made the mistake of believing them.' Nevertheless, many of the reports continue to portray Geelani as a guilty man who has escaped through some legal loophole. Why, even Kuldip Nayar thinks the acquittal is a result of the inability of the police to establish their case.

There is no media report that captures the really extraordinary feature of this case: that Geelani, from the very beginning, asked the court to put all the evidence on record. And the prosecution has refused to do so. First, there was the intercepted conversation between his younger brother and him on 14 December 2001. It was the main prosecution evidence against Geelani. The police informed the court that they had started tapping his phone from the night of December 13 to the afternoon of the next day. All the conversations were in a cassette marked C1. These included many conversations between him and other family members in Kashmir. Geelani asked the court on several occasions to put the entire cassette on record. However, the police only produced the 2.16-minute conversation between him and his brother on the afternoon of 14 December 2001.

In the High Court, Geelani filed an application requesting permission to explain each telephone conversation. The prosecution had placed the Airtel record of 521 calls made between October and December 2001.

Geelani said the Sessions Court had denied him an opportunity to explain these calls when he made his statement to the court under section 313 of the Criminal Procedure Code. He was willing to do so during the appeal.

Second, Geelani asked the court to arrange a transcript of the conversation by someone conversant with the Kashmiri language. He even suggested that the court appoint an IAS or IPS officer. The Sessions Court refused to direct the prosecution to do so. To date the prosecution has not put on record a Kashmiri transcript of the conversation, even though it claimed that this was the main evidence against Geelani to establish his complicity in the conspiracy to attack the Parliament. Two expert witnesses produced by the defence, Sampat Prakash and Sanjay Kak, put the transcript and translation on record in the court.

Third, Geelani admitted the conversation even though the tape was inaudible. The Central Forensic Lab in Delhi returned a finding that it could not conduct a voice sample test since the tape was inaudible. And yet the prosecution witness, Rashid the vegetable vendor from Azad market, claimed to have deciphered it after hearing it a few times.

Fourth, the interception of the conversation was in violation of the procedures laid down under the Indian Telegraph Act and the POTA. Although Geelani's lawyers did challenge the procedures, they did not make it their main defence. And at the High Court they did not even argue the point.

Fifth, the prosecution failed to produce Geelani's brother as a witness. If the conversation showed complicity then clearly the younger brother knew of Geelani's role in the conspiracy. The police told the court that on questioning the younger brother they found he was innocent.

Consequently they did not bother to take down his formal statement under section 161 of the Criminal Procedure Code, even for the record.

The Delhi High Court has held:

‘Prosecution had relied upon the conversation between Geelani and his brother in the afternoon of 14th December 2001 and had contended that the talk was incriminating, in that it showed Geelani’s participation in the attack on Parliament House. We had, while discussing the taped conversation, even assuming the prosecution version to be correct, come to the conclusion that there was nothing which could incriminate Geelani as far as the conversation is concerned.’

Finally, the only other evidence against Geelani was his acquaintance with the co-accused. Geelani has never once attempted to deny this, admitting he knew them from well before the period of conspiracy. The Delhi High Court judgement stated that the record of telephone calls between him and his co-accused is the only other evidence: ‘We are, therefore, left with only one piece of evidence against S.A.R. Geelani being the record of telephone calls between him and the accused Mohd. Afzal and Shaukat. This circumstance, in our opinion, does not remotely, far less definitely and unerringly, point towards the guilt of the accused S.A.R. Geelani.’

There was no other evidence against S.A.R. Geelani. He was acquitted *not* because the prosecution could not produce evidence, but because there was no evidence to produce.

And so the inevitable question: Why was Geelani arrested? Why should the police want to frame an innocent man? Suddenly our usual skepticism about the police dissolves in the face of our suspicions about Kashmiri Muslims. Instead of asking why the Special Branch carried out

such a shoddy investigation, we start doubting the innocence of a ‘blameless citizen’ who has been victimized by a ‘corrupt and communal’ police and a ‘prejudiced’ Designated Judge.

Let us examine the facts relating to the actual attack that have emerged in the course of the trial of the four accused in the Parliament attack case, facts which the media has refused to publish, facts that raise uncomfortable questions that must be answered if we want to protect Indian democracy.

At first the government told us that the attack was the handiwork of Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad and that the five attackers were Pakistanis. Our Home Minister announced in Parliament that they ‘looked Pakistanis’. However, in the course of the trial, not one of the prosecution’s 80 witnesses ever alleged that any of the four accused belonged to any terrorist organization. Even the Designated Court was hard put to find a way of convicting the accused of belonging to any terrorist organization. As for the five men who actually attacked the Parliament, the only ‘evidence’ that they were Pakistanis was that no Indian came forward to claim their bodies.

The main accused, Mohammad Afzal, is a self-confessed surrendered militant – a renegade in the eyes of militants. Besides, he is a surrendered militant of the JKLF, a group that has already laid down arms. Why would a Pakistan-based militant organization trust a renegade, that too of the JKLF, with such an important job? Especially when the man has been working in Delhi for the past ten years and his entire motivation seems to have been money.

Afzal has not denied being a part of the conspiracy to attack the Parliament. He said he brought one of the attackers, Mohammad, from the STF

camp (Special Task Force). However, he also insisted that he did not know the other four attackers who were killed during the attack. If he can be sentenced to death on three counts on the basis of his own confession, why can we not believe the other part of his story recorded in the court under section 313 of the Criminal Procedure Code?

We must demand that the government table a full report on the facts relating to the attack on Parliament. We have a right to know who actually attacked our Parliament. Why have we not made this demand? Out of a sense of nationalism? Are matters of national security best left to the state, no matter what its character? Do we seriously believe that this government can bring about a lasting solution to the Kashmir question if only Geelani keeps quiet and we refuse to raise awkward questions?

When we began our struggle for a fair trial for Geelani we were fighting not for an individual but for basic democratic values and principles. By the time Geelani was acquitted, many were convinced that it was also a fight for him as an individual. As one of his colleagues at Zakir Hussain College commented, ‘He has been worth fighting for.’ He has shown exemplary courage, both during his trial and after his release. He relied entirely on our commitment to get him acquitted, a trust based on shared concerns and values. If we ask him to maintain silence, we only betray our country and ourselves.

It is only when we have real democracy in India can we expect others to respect us. We should remember Kalhan’s warning in the *Rajtarangni*, in the 12th century: Such is Kashmir, the country that may be conquered by the force of spiritual merit but not by armed force.

The colours of the rainbow

T.N. NINAN

THE question at the start of the new year is whether India is in fact 'shining' (as Jaswant Singh's Rs 50 crore advertising campaign tells us), and entering a new 'golden age'—as other finance ministry worthies have proclaimed—or whether the long-awaited revival of economic and business momentum is a product of little more than a near-perfect monsoon. In short, are we going to break out of the 5.5-6% average growth rate that the Indian economy has clocked since 1980, and get to the 6.5-7% range that will signal a shift in gears?

It's a relief to be able to even debate the issue, for it underlines the change of tempo that had been awaited for two long and frustrating years, ever since the dotcom boom went bust in late 2000, and which is now the subject of government song. But the important issue is the answer to the question: is this a monsoon-induced blip, or a new growth curve?

To put the conclusion before the arguments, I see nothing to warrant a change in what I wrote for *Seminar* a year ago (in the January 2003 issue), namely: 'Although there is no sign yet that the economy will break out of the 5.5% growth band that has characterised the past five years, the signs of a change in tempo are everywhere. And this time round, the recovery is likely to be more broad-based and more sustainable than was the case with the last two mini-recoveries, in 1997 and 2000. If the situation is managed well, we could even see the economy getting onto a 6% plus rate of growth.'

As they say in the television news, now for the details.

To understand the dynamics of what is happening, we need to separate the different colours in the rainbow that dominates some of the 'shining' ads, colours whose sequence school students memorise by using

the acronym Vibgyor. So, here is our VIBGYOR for the economy:

V is for the Vote, in search of which the government might allow politics to come in the way of further economic reform;

I is for the International commodity price cycle, now in the upswing;

B is for the Business scene that has changed for the better;

G is for the Growth story in telecom, infotech, housing, automobiles and pharmaceuticals;

Y is for the Yellow Brick Road that our own Wizard of Oz, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is laying across the country, and is a metaphor for investment in infrastructure;

O is for the Opening up of more sectors and markets through further reform; and

R is for the rain that came with the monsoon.

We need to understand these seven Vibgyor colours to figure out whether Jaswant Singh can do a Judy Garland and belt out a baritone version of 'Over the rainbow', or whether he will find, like Dorothy, that the whole sequence is but a passing dream before reality intrudes.

First, the facts. The recovery story that was outlined in Seminar a year ago has been confirmed. Corporate profits have soared, sales have done better than before, and industry is once again talking of investing in new capacity. Some sectors have enjoyed an outstanding year, like telecommunications, automobiles and housing. Others have seen renewed momentum, like software. Exports have borne up well, despite the strengthening rupee. Agriculture will have a bumper year, and the expected surge in rural demand is probably about to kick in, post-harvest. By the year-end, the signs of a boom environment are with us: you can't get a seat on a plane

into India, or a room in a hotel. They are all full up.

The recovery story has been recognised across the world, as India is once again the flavour of the season among those fund managers who focus on the emerging markets. The wall of money that has moved into India over the past year (a record seven billion dollars in portfolio investment) has driven up stock prices to levels not reached since the heady days of the dotcom era. And by all accounts (for you will have to search long and hard to find a market bear today), there is some momentum still left in the surge. Which means the wealth effect has kicked in and the feel-good factor has returned among investors.

As for the reasons, it's best to start with the R factor in Vibgyor, or the rains. Do recall what the mood in the country was when the first monsoon forecast (in April-May) talked of a below-normal monsoon, how nerves were on edge when the monsoon arrived late, and how quickly the mood changed once it became clear that it was in fact going to be normal. To put this R factor in perspective though, it is no great achievement to clock 7% plus GDP growth in a year that follows a drought and which also has a good monsoon. For instance, we saw a much sharper economic recovery in 1988-89, the year following the last drought (in 1987).

So if agricultural growth dipped into negative territory last year (recording -3%), and this year records a positive 3% on the *pre-drought* year, then agriculture will have grown 6% on last year – contributing 1.5 percentage points to the GDP growth figure. Take that away, and this year's GDP growth will be not much more than 5.5%, which is what it has been for over two decades. So the first point is easily established: the current forecasts for

this year's GDP numbers do *not* show a shift in gears by the economy; the growth acceleration is essentially (but not wholly) monsoon-driven.

If the R factor has been fortuitous, so has the I element: international commodity prices have been rising in a sharp upward curve that has spelt manna for commodity producers. Steel sold at less than \$200 per tonne of hot rolled coils in the days when the industry was in crisis, and steel manufacturers used to hope and pray that prices would recover to at least \$250; they are now reaching for \$400 – driven largely by ratcheting Chinese demand. So, understandably, it is celebration time in steeltown. Aluminium, copper and most non-food agriculturals have also seen a price surge. *The Economist*'s index for non-food commodity prices shows a dramatic increase in prices: 23% over the past year. And since a good chunk of Indian industry is in fact commodity-based, even if we do not include oil – it has naturally been able to show a sharp profit recovery.

This has had two beneficial side effects. The banks and financial institutions, which had lent heavily to finance the creation of steel capacity, suddenly find their books becoming much healthier because all the sticky loans given to the steel companies now look good in the books. And second, the crisis-ridden Unit Trust of India, which has needed not one but two bailouts, suddenly finds its investment portfolio looking healthy enough for it to meet all its pay-out commitments. Which underlines the point that when the real (or physical) economy is doing well, the financial sector too will usually be healthy.

But it would be a mistake to conclude that the new tempo that has characterised most of 2003, and which promises to continue into the new year,

is a result merely of the gods smiling on us. For there has been deeper change, below the surface, which will deliver long-lasting results, and this brings us to the B factor: the business scene. Through the difficult years from 1997 to 2002, when India's manufacturing companies were besieged by a sense of crisis, many firms put their heads down and did exactly what they had to do: cut costs, improved efficiency, upgraded quality, modernised the technology in use, and reached for economies of scale. This, combined with consolidation of capacity in various product sectors (which gets rid of the price spoilers), has meant that the winners are now leaner, meaner and ready to take on the world.

I mentioned some examples of such companies in Seminar a year ago (Tata Steel, TVS Motors, Tata Motors, Ballarpur Industries, Bharat Forge and Bajaj Auto). And we learn quite a lot by looking at what has happened to the share prices of these very same companies, over the past year. While the Sensex has climbed by about 90% over the year (itself a comment on the year, since the index had fallen in the two previous years), three of our chosen six companies have doubled their stock prices, two have trebled, and one has quadrupled. All six manufacturing companies have done better than the benchmark stock market index. In other words, investors have recognised the change in India's manufacturing story.

The revival of confidence in Indian manufacturing shows up also in the way export numbers have held up despite the strengthening rupee, and in the altogether new development of the year: Indian companies making acquisitions overseas. Thus, Bharat Forge has bought one of the two largest forging companies in Germany, Tata Motors is the frontrunner

for acquiring the Daewoo truck company in South Korea, and Indian Rayon has bought a chemical firm in China, while Hindalco and Sterlite have bought mining companies in Australia and Zambia, respectively. There's more, of course: Sundram Fasteners has bought an engineering firm in the UK, Ranbaxy has bought a pharmaceutical firm in France, and Asian Paints a unit in Fiji. These acquisitions speak of a new confidence and a willingness to go global in a way that simply did not exist before. It also underlines the point that future growth for these and other companies will not be limited by the constraints of the Indian market.

The question, though, is whether the change in the manufacturing story is confined to a handful of 'poster-boy' companies, or goes deeper and extends to the business sector as a whole. The aggregate numbers on corporate performance suggest the less exciting answer, because the increased profits this past year have been contributed more by savings on interest income and by 'other income' than by earnings from mainstream operations. In other words, operating margins have hardly improved; whereas, if operational efficiencies had been achieved across the board, the operating margins would logically have shown a healthy increase. The conclusion that one might draw from this is that Indian manufacturing has not seen change that is deep and wide, and that change is still confined to what one might call the upper crust.

However, the anecdotal evidence suggests otherwise. You can talk to almost any company today and listen to pretty dramatic stories of how costs have been cut, operations made more efficient, and staff trimmed. If one were to go by these tell-tale pointers, then the fact that there is only marginal

change in operating margins has some other explanation. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that markets have become more competitive, so that companies have to keep dropping prices in order to retain or win customers. Certainly, the anecdotal evidence points to this being the explanation, and this viewpoint is buttressed by the very low inflation that continues to be clocked for manufacturing products as a whole. In other words, companies have saved costs by becoming more efficient, but these benefits have mostly been passed on to consumers. The falling prices of everything from soaps to cars and from TV sets to newspapers tell their own story.

A wonderful case study for understanding this is provided by Maruti Udyog, which has set itself the seemingly impossible target of achieving a 50% improvement in productivity over three years. Mid-way through the three-year programme, the multiple charts tossed up by Jagdish Khattar, the company's managing director, show stunning change in such key parameters as the number of man-hours used to turn out a car. The result is that Maruti is able to offer its customers cars with a lower price tag than before, and still make a handsome profit (compared to the losses of a couple of years ago). Once again, the stock market has responded by nearly trebling the company's price within months of its initial share offering to the public. There are less dramatic but equally real stories dotting the country's industrial landscape, whether it is Mahindra & Mahindra or tyre cord manufacturer SRF, Samtel (the TV picture tube company) or Apollo Tyres.

Yet, strangely, these very real changes do not show up in the aggregate numbers on industrial growth, which continue month after month to clock a modest 6%, give or take a lit-

tle. Perhaps this is because the turnaround and growth stories are confined to a handful of sectors; perhaps industry is still dominated by the public sector giants where change has been patchy; and perhaps performance is held back by the sector-wide problems in broad-based industries like textiles and mining, sugar and capital goods/machinery, all of which incidentally have been crying out for reform.

In addition, what the numbers don't catch is the distress almost across the board in small-scale industry, where significant numbers of entrepreneurs do not even expect to survive the next five years (going by an extensive survey of small-scale units). It doesn't help that public debate on current economic issues does not touch on the subject of small-scale industry; and the danger is that, even if it does, the debate will be stuck in the rut of outmoded ideas that have long since outlived their utility (if they ever had any).

That should lead us into questions about the O factor, with regard to the further opening up of markets and sectors, but it is important before that to record the G factor which has in many ways provided the crucial thrust for the year's change of mood. One might even call it G-force, because what we have seen is 'take-off' rates of growth in half a dozen areas. Housing, for instance, as interest rates have cascaded down and the banks have fallen over one another to hand out housing loans to anyone who strays into a bank branch.

The fall in interest rates was of course overdue, given the drop in inflation rates over the past few years. And considering how slow it was in coming, it has been doubly welcome. It has fuelled growth in not just housing but also in automobiles (which have seen G-force level growth in

sales, reaching as much as 40% in some months). In telecom the fall in prices has been even greater than in interest rates – leading to China-style growth numbers when it comes to new connections (over 1.5 million a month). But even that pales into insignificance when one looks at what has happened on the stock market, where stock prices have surged by an unforeseeable 90% or so (aided once again by the low interest rates, which have made equities preferable to debt).

Finally, we feel the G-force operating as the IT sector has acquired new thrust. The growing turbulence in other countries as the business process outsourcing rocket gathers momentum is one indicator of this; another is the fact that companies are stretching their operations into even hitherto neglected corners of the country and setting up outsize call centres in places like job-scarce Kolkata and the backwater of Bhubaneswar. In software itself, the leading companies are again pushing the throttle as the brief lull in tempo has come to an end, and as they re-work their business models to go beyond single-function contracts and take on the responsibility for providing that new buzzword: end-to-end solutions.

A fourth factor is the extension of outsourcing into novel areas like radiology (reading and analysing the results of various medical tests, whose results are zapped across the wires to India where radiologists cost a tenth of what they do in the US), equity research (as the big investment banks set up arm's length shops in Mumbai, again at a tenth of the cost) and even hard-core applied engineering research – so that some of the biggest new research centres in traditionally tech-oriented Bangalore (the Indian Institute of Science, ISRO, Hindustan

Aeronautics, and so on) are now private foreign-owned establishments like Intel, Honeywell, SAP and General Electric – with each of them employing hundreds if not thousands of staff, among whom a goodly number are Ph.Ds who are busy making a variety of breakthroughs and filing dozens of patents each year.

The R&D work now being done in India by foreign firms involves cutting edge product development, such as on the next generation of computer chips, or integrating with research in the home country so that it becomes a seamless whole. So, despite the public hullabaloo on the issue of job losses in the West, it is clear that the IT sector will continue to grow rapidly and may diversify even further. India's resource endowments, the skills and abilities of its people and the institutional support mechanisms (the spread of engineering and other educational institutions, and now the plentiful supply of broadband connectivity) have converged to make the country the prime winner in a whole series of white collar activities.

This growth is generating many spin-off businesses. Real estate development, for instance, since companies need acres of space for their expanding offices. In virtually all the big towns, new office space is now being counted in millions of square feet. Then there are the food and transport contracts for the 13,000 people employed in GE's call centres, the 5,000 who will soon be employed by Honeywell, and by the many thousands more in the offices of Convergys, Daksh and Spectramind, not to mention Infosys, Wipro and TCS.

Add to that the downstream real estate activity that will be sparked off by these well-paid employees taking on housing loans and acquiring a roof

over their heads – converting India into more of a home-ownership (and less of a rental) market. Without question, some of the buoyancy in automobile demand too is the result of this job creation, and when we look down the road, there will be greater demand for schools and hospitals, holiday homes and the expanding range of other needs of a thrusting middle class. All of these underline the G factor that we see all around us today.

This account would suggest that the Indian economy has in fact shifted gears and is now in top gear. After all, we have already been among the 10 fastest growing economies in the world since 1980, which was the transition year when the Indian economy shifted from its 3.5% ‘Hindu’ rate of growth to 5.5%. And while our performance has paled in comparison with our East Asian neighbours, including China, it is reasonable to believe that today we are poised for acceleration to a sustained growth rate of 6% and more. The question is whether we can do even better, and move from top gear into overdrive. That brings up the three remaining letters in VIBGYOR: the Yellow Brick Road, the Opening up of more sectors and markets (read: reform), and the forthcoming Vote. And it is here that the answers are not very flattering, and it is here that we need change, urgent change.

For all the successes of the prime minister’s road project (and the failures – as recent headlines have pointed out), and despite the improvements in port efficiency, the plain fact is that India’s economic infrastructure is not what it ought to be. We still have a poor power situation, and the pace of goods movement is pre-modern (one week to get a truckload of goods from Delhi to Mumbai, when it should take two days). Port turnaround time for ships, at 3.5 days, is better than the seven days

of old, but nowhere near the international norm of one or two days. Our airports are still a public embarrassment, even Kunming in the backward south-western corner of China has an infinitely better airport than either Delhi or Mumbai. The only infrastructure sector which is not a constraint is telecom, but here too the international rates for connections (vital for the call centres) are higher than in rival countries like the Philippines.

It could be argued that change is coming on all these fronts, but seeing is believing. The new electricity law has opened up the troubled power sector to a new set of rules, which if they work will make a real difference in two or three years’ time. But it is going to be a long haul to invest in the systems and processes that will cut power theft, reduce unmetered consumption, and achieve operational efficiencies so that consumers do not have to pay the outrageous sum of Rs 7 per unit (against a supply cost of less than Rs 3), as they do today in some of our cities.

The road sector is not short of funding, thanks to the cess on petrol and diesel, but implementation issues have cropped up all over the place and deadlines have begun to get pushed back – and we may find soon enough that the quality of work is variable too. In civil aviation, we are seeing some movement at long last to facilitate fresh investment in airlines and airports. But there is a time lag of three to five years between policy and market reality, so change that we can see and feel is still some distance away. And in the case of the railways, reform is still barely a gleam in the railway minister’s eye. Any action lies well beyond the visible horizon.

If one were to be optimistic about the scene, one could argue that in almost all these sectors corrective

action has begun, and that we will have a different infrastructure story to tell in about five years’ time. But that brings us to virtually the end of the first decade of the new century, a decade that should rightly have been India’s. So these can only be counted as lost years.

As for opening up (the O factor), there are still many question marks. The big change since the Vajpayee government assumed office in 1998, is that many more Indians now see that the country gains more than it loses from such opening up. The lowering of tariffs and the end of import controls (forced on us by an American law-suit under the WTO’s dispute settlement mechanism) has not seen a flood of foreign goods, as had been feared; instead, we have had a surplus on our current account in the last couple of years, resulting in the flood of dollars that has sent foreign exchange reserves surging past the \$100 billion mark.

The question, therefore, is whether the notion of India being a winner through globalisation is an idea with broad acceptance; broad enough, that is, to lend support to the new measures that are now required: further slashing of import tariffs, further opening up to foreign investment, further rolling back of domestic price controls and other forms of government intervention in markets, further privatisation (stalled at the moment because of the Supreme Court’s judgement on the oil companies’ sale).

Then there are all the issues that frustrated reformers have simply stopped talking about: laws that help create a more flexible labour market, an end to the counter-productive policy of small-scale reservations, raising user charges for government-provided services so that the fisc stops bleeding, sectoral reforms in areas like textiles

(which at least saw changes in tax policy in the last budget) and sugar, reform of agricultural policies (price and movement controls, not to speak of wasteful state procurement arrangements), genuine price decontrol in oil... it's a long list.

There is also the issue of budget deficits which have remained stubbornly high despite more than a decade of effort. The drop in interest rates provides some relief, since the cost of government borrowing has come down, and the past year saw the passage of a new law that mandates an end to revenue deficits in four years – an ambitious target. But it remains to be seen whether the government will in fact be able to trim the subsidy bill (now in a phase of runaway growth), slash the size and scope of government (frequently promised, never done), and improve tax compliance while finding effective and non-intrusive ways of taxing the under-taxed services sector.

There are also fundamental issues of governance that have become a matter of serious concern, since the delivery of basic services with a modicum of efficiency is now more than what the average citizen can ask for in states like Bihar and UP. No economy can move to 7% growth in the face of such reality. Indeed, the western and southern parts of the country are already doing 7 or 8% growth and more; so the national average is held back only by the perilous state of governance in the east and parts of the north. If these parts of the country do not get reformed, the national performance will continue to suffer – especially since much of the increase in population comes from these troubled states. So the government, indeed all governments, have to reform themselves before growth can truly accelerate. This is a more important and more fun-

damental, and more urgent, issue than most people seem to realise.

What is worth noting is that this large and daunting agenda has not changed very much in the past year, suggesting little reform activity. The biggest strides forward have been in the passage of the electricity and fiscal laws, beyond that there has been little action (especially after privatisation got stalled). If this will be the speed at which we address the agenda, then acceleration to 7% GDP growth is going to be awhile coming.

For the immediate future, though, there is the V factor – or the vote. It now seems likely that the government will call a snap election by April, by which time the (bumper) rabi harvest will be in and the next monsoon will not have developed into a risk factor. Fortunately, four months is not enough time for the government to waste much money on populist announcements, and the BJP's new-found confidence about winning the poll could well mean that it will not see the need for scorched-earth populism. The middle class's feel-good sentiment, the farmer's smile following successive good harvests, and the general buoyancy of an economy on the rebound could convince the government that it does not need to do anything other than underline the economic successes in order to win over key constituencies in society.

The more lasting issue, though, is whether the elections will deliver a stable government that can undertake the many challenges at hand. Experience has shown that the lead party in the ruling coalition (and a coalition is inevitable) must have dominant strength so that it is immune from blackmail by fringe groups. This probably means at least 180-190 seats. On present reckoning, that's well within the realm of possibility.

Backpage

MUCH of the debate in the year gone by was dominated by Iraq, or more correctly the US policy on Iraq, the Middle East and, by extension, the global 'war on terror'. With Saddam Hussein in incarceration, his sons killed, and many of his close associates in prison, dead, or in hiding, will the discourse take a new turn? Now that the Bush administration has 'got him', will we witness a clearer unfolding of US design? On this hangs the fate of 2004.

The post-Saddam capture discourse continues to be as deeply divided as the earlier debate on the efficacy of war for 'regime change'. In part this is because few, barring the radical conservative caucus running Pentagon, can claim coherent understanding of US policy and strategy. Was all this mobilization and destruction only for securing control over Iraq's oil reserves? Or was the intention to establish a beachhead in the region, a first step towards redrawing the Middle East map? Few believed, despite exertions by the US propaganda machine with 'able' assistance from Tony Blair, that Iraq 2003 was about destruction of weapons of mass destruction, ridding the world of a terrible dictator and mass murderer, and bringing freedom and democracy to a long suffering people.

Well, the 'dictator' and his associates now seem part of history even though resistance to US 'occupation' of Iraq refuses to die out. There is likelihood that it may even intensify. The Shia groups, so far somewhat muted because Saddam was still at large, may now become more restive. So too may the Kurds in the North. After all, the US actions so far – the slow pace of restoring civic infrastructure, the continuing breakdown in law and order, above all the cornering of rebuilding contacts by US firms close to Rumsfeld – do little to inspire faith in US fairness.

On the other hand, the US has shown the determination to hang on despite a substantial loss of lives. Erstwhile critics like Germany and France, seeing the writing on the wall, have now modulated their stance. Gadaffi's Libya has now agreed to dismantle its WMD programme. Above all, notwithstanding substantial unease about the media portrayal of a captive Saddam, there have been few demonstrations in his favour. Little surprise that Bush's popularity ratings, which had dipped to an alarming low, are now on the rise.

Much will depend on how the US handles the coming days. Will it seek to mend fences with its erstwhile detractors, permit an expanded role for the United Nations, be less parsimonious in awarding reconstruction contracts and, most important, work at winning the 'hearts and minds' of the Iraqi people? Sceptics will continue to scoff and regurgitate familiar arguments about US arrogance and short sightedness, but few can deny that the capture of Saddam marks a turning point.

Closer home, many have been surprised by India's guarded response to these events. Not so long back there was furious speculation about India sending troops to Iraq. The Home Minister, L.K. Advani, on a visit to the US, ostensibly even gave an assurance to this effect. And the US interest in getting India on board was hardly secret. Nevertheless, in the end, we stayed away, and today are not joining the western celebrations. The Petroleum Minister, Ram Naik, has even ventured to characterize Saddam's capture as 'unfortunate'.

Few, particularly from the left and secular camp, expected such modulated behaviour from the BJP. It is, after all, routinely derided as communal and anti-Muslim, even more an enthusiastic camp follower of the US. So does this present response indicate a cooling off vis-à-vis the US? Or is it, now that the BJP led NDA regime feels more secure about itself, a reassertion of a bi-partisan, national consensus on India's foreign policy? If only Vajpayee can rein in the Hindutva hotheads and kick-start a process of normalization with Pakistan, India's status as the world's second largest Muslim country can enable it to play a constructive role in tempering the obsession with the 'clash of civilizations' thesis.

It is likely that the coming months will witness substantial churning in international affairs. At one level, all of us will need to come to terms with the centrality of the US in defining the new rules of the game. And if the US policy manages to rescue itself from the clutches of the radical conservatives and display greater generosity and less righteousness, it may win over newer adherents to its view of the world. It could, as easily, remain a prisoner of its hubris and seek to play global cop. If so, we are in for troubled times.

Harsh Sethi

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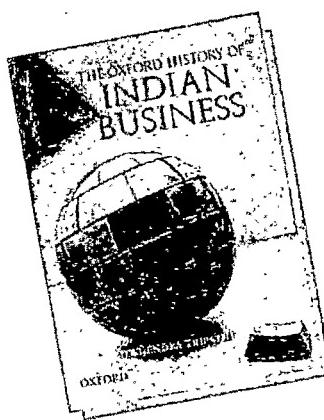
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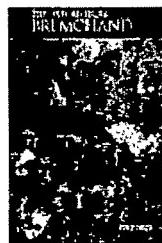
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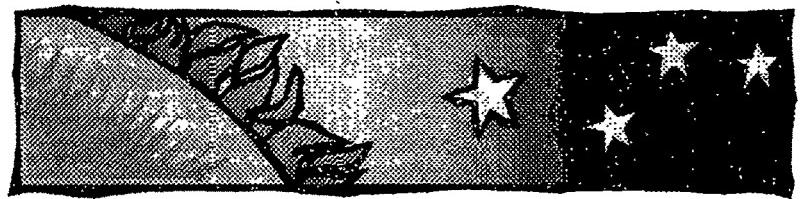
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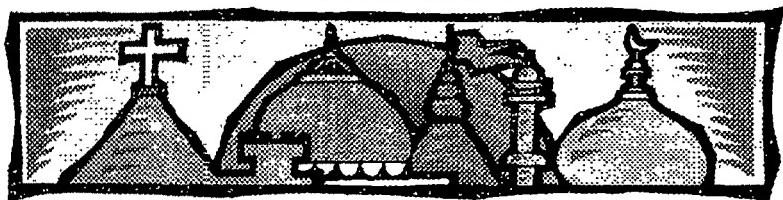
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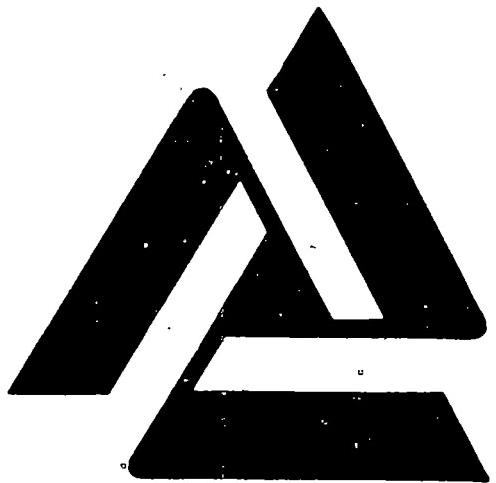
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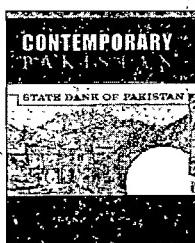
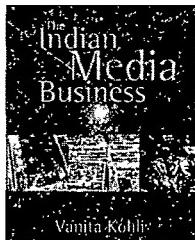
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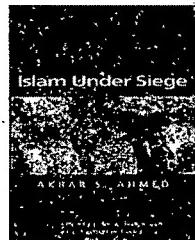
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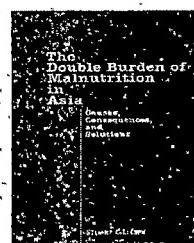
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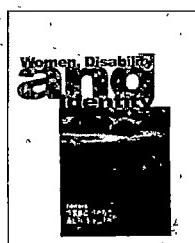
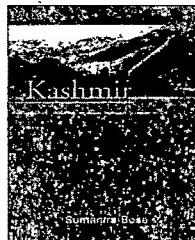
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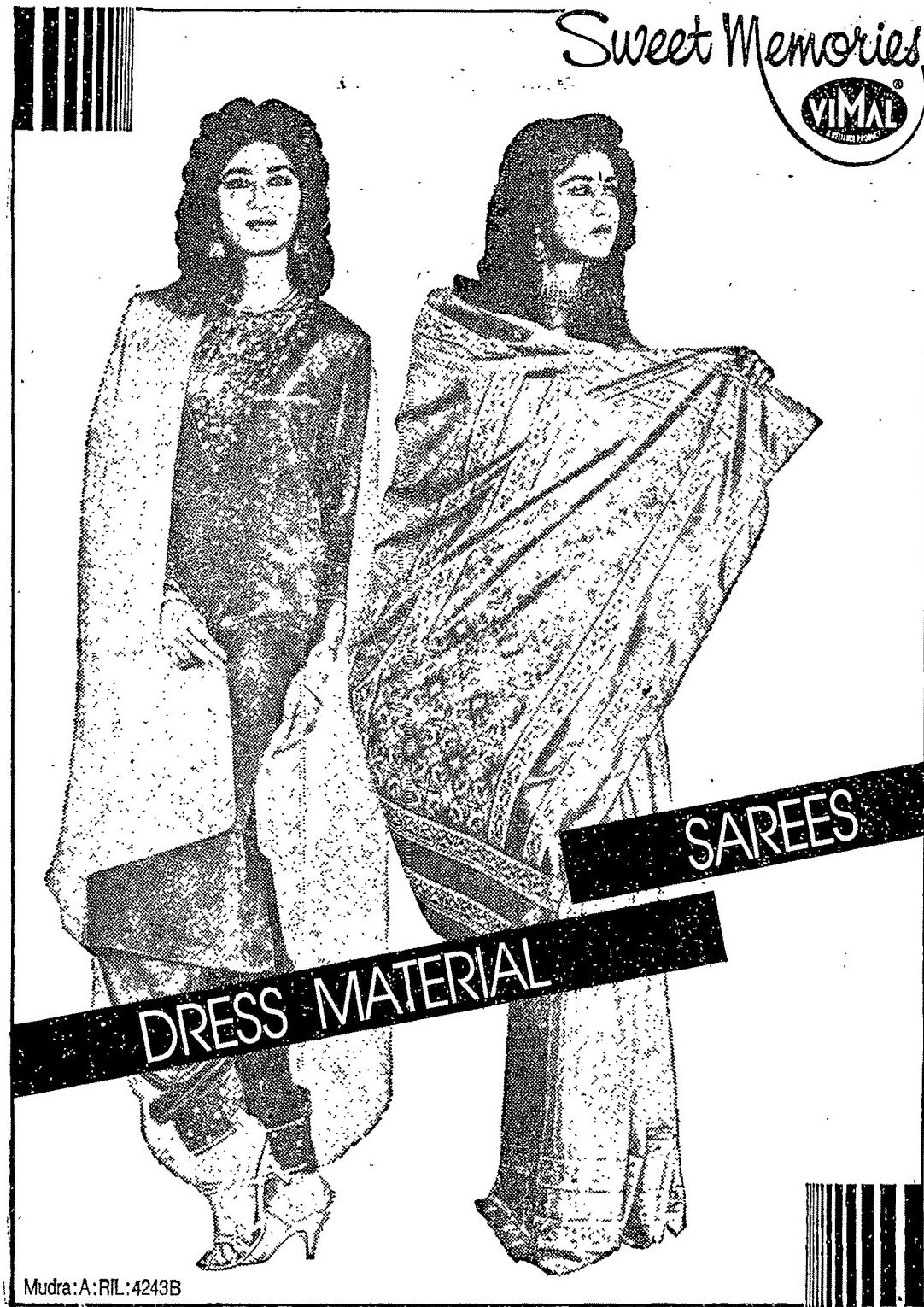
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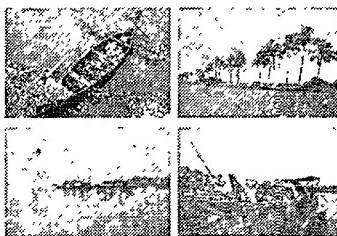


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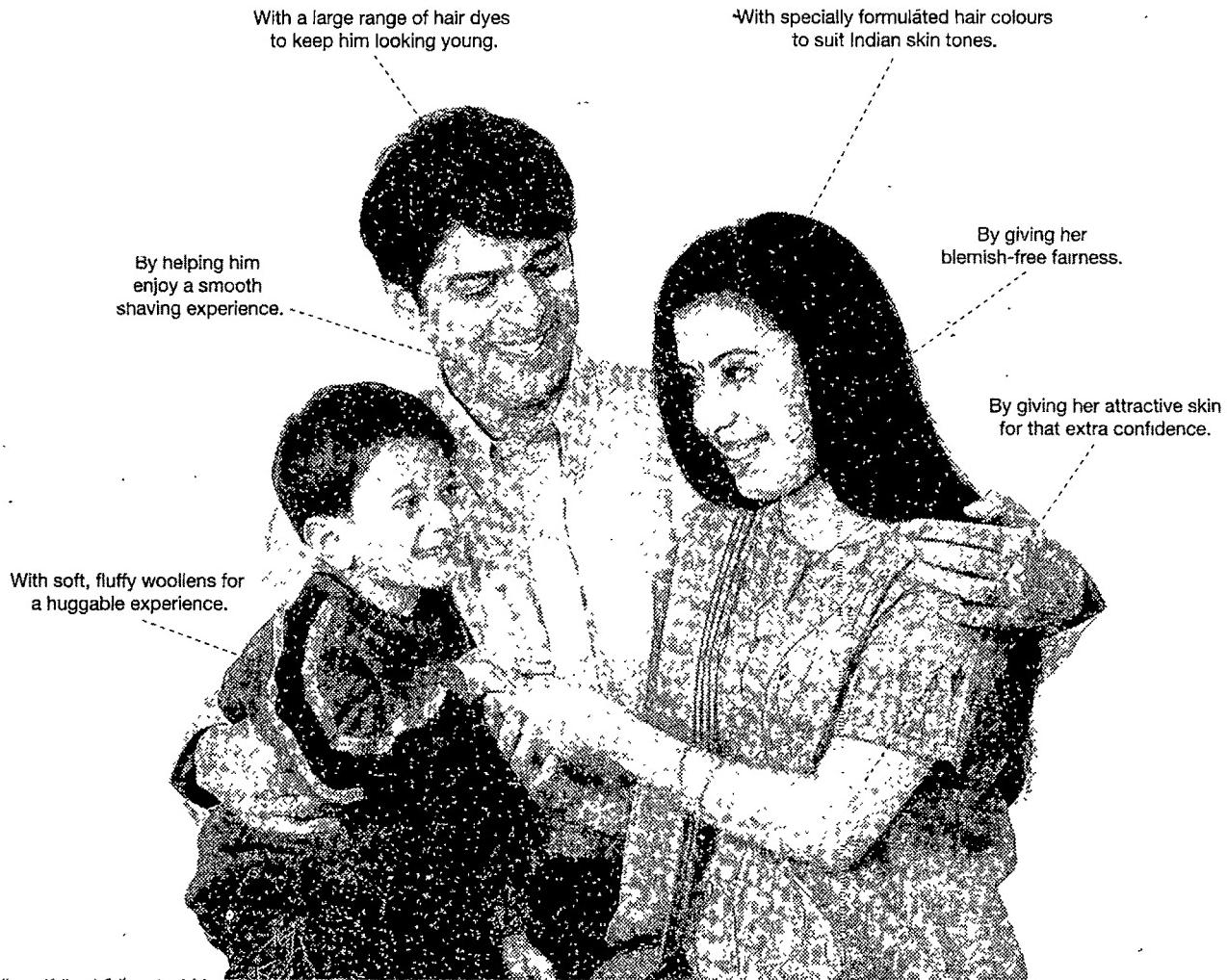


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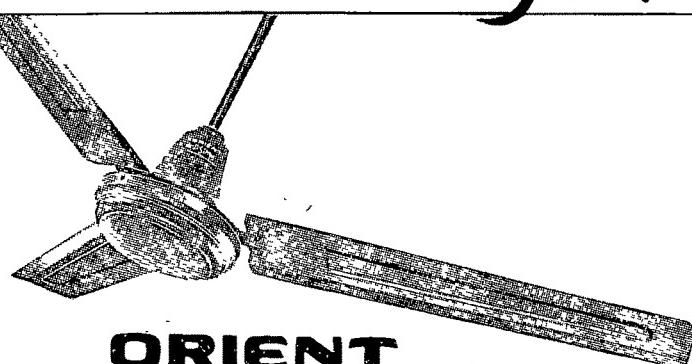
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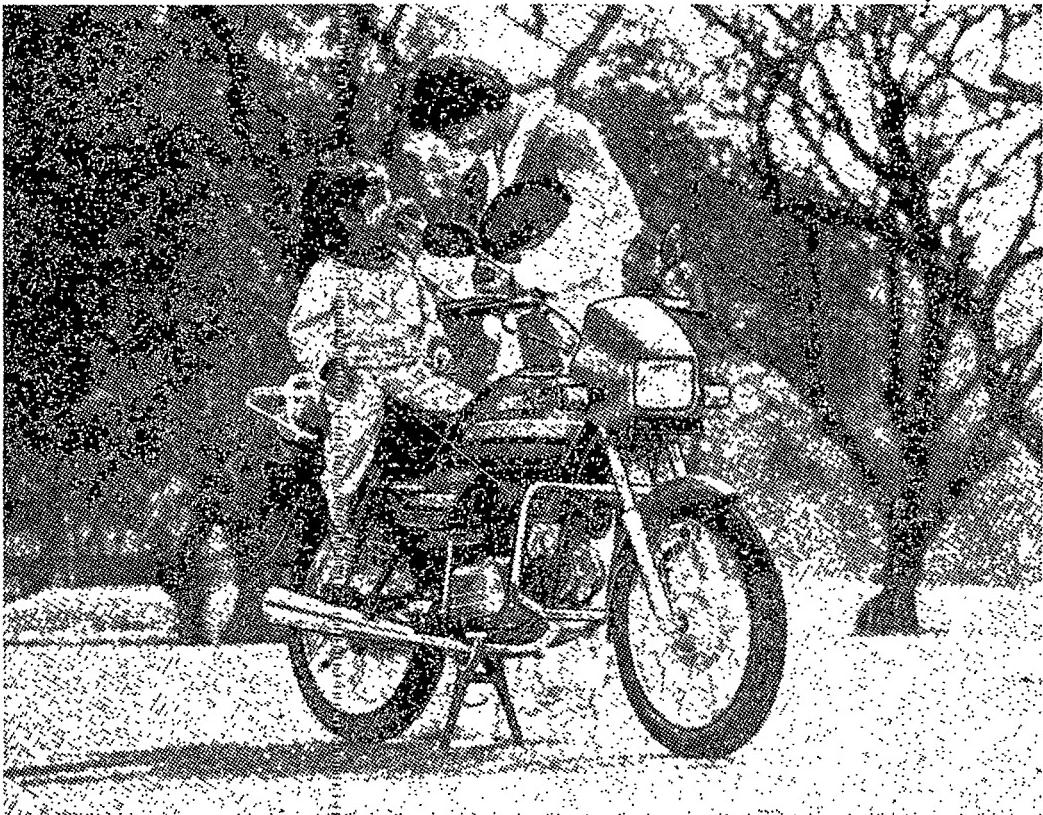


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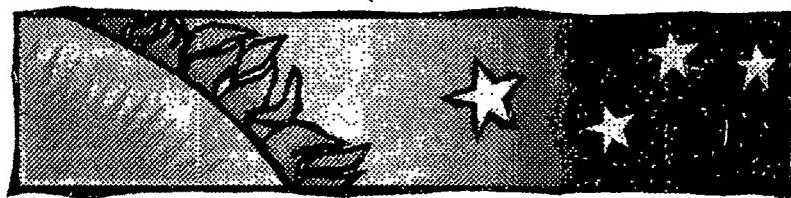
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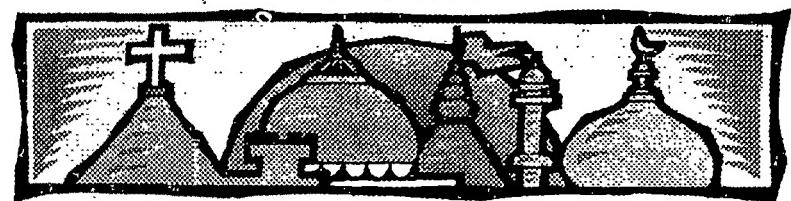
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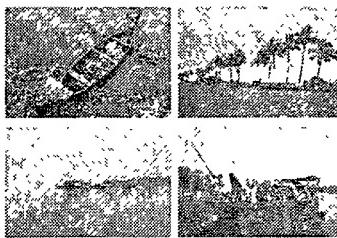
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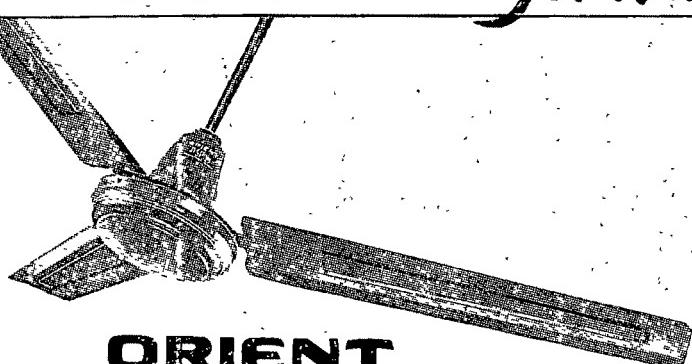
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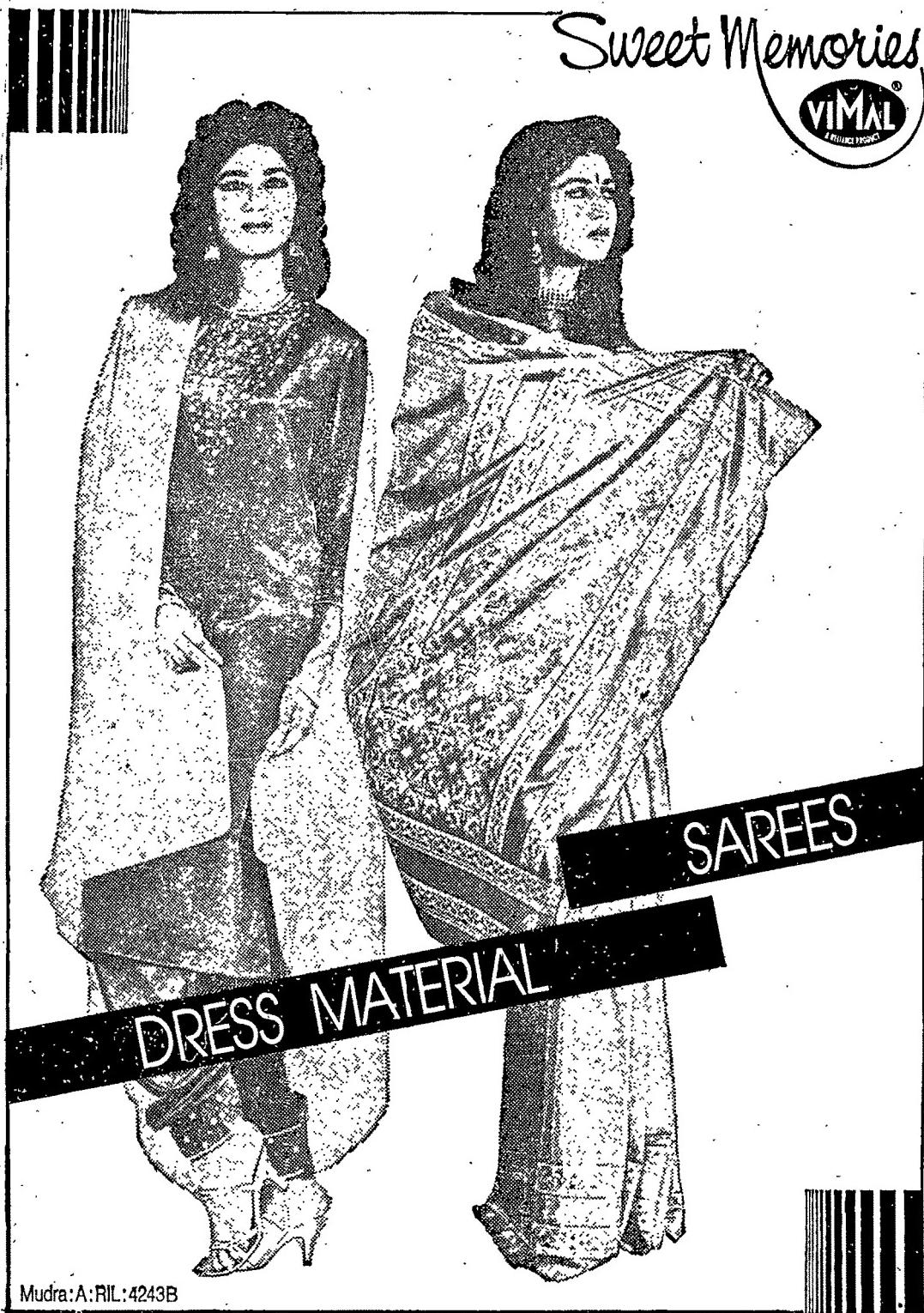
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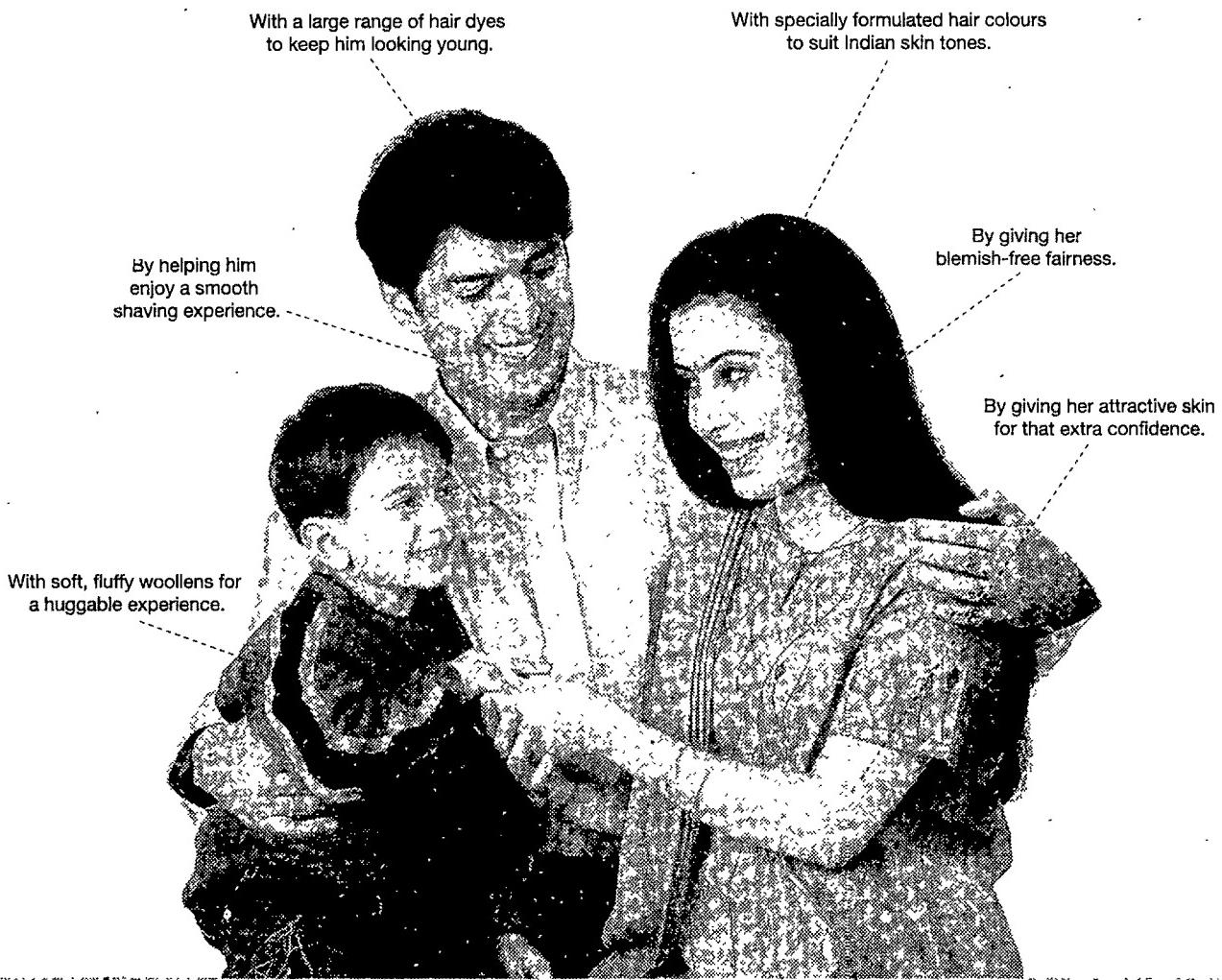
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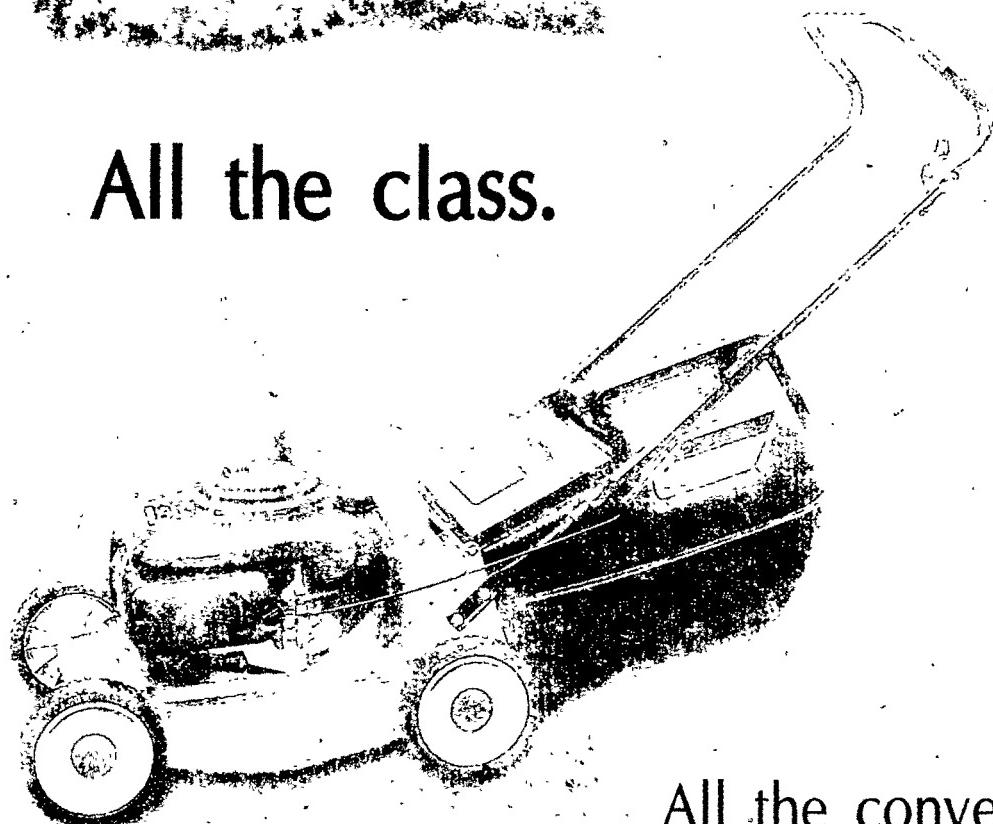
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The problem

IT is not often that electoral verdicts follow a pre-ordained script. And no matter what political pundits and psephologists claim, voters have a way of springing surprises. In this sense at least, the December 2003 elections to the state assemblies of Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram were no different. Though most pre-poll surveys had predicted a victory for Sheila Dikshit in Delhi and a defeat for Digvijay Singh in Madhya Pradesh, even hard core BJP enthusiasts could not have imagined the scale of their victory in Rajasthan. As for Chhattisgarh, particularly after the telecasting of the Judeo tapes leading to the expectation of a hung assembly, the results must have come as a pleasant surprise for the BJP.

But more than the 3-1 victory for the BJP in the Hindi heartland, placing a serious dampner on the Congress' ambitions of returning to power at the Centre, the recently concluded state assembly elections mark important shifts in the political landscape of the country. For a start, they have provided a new impetus to the otherwise sagging NDA coalition, nudging it to go in for early general elections sometime between March and May this year. They have also considerably strengthened Vajpayee's position as a politician-statesman foregrounding development and peace, giving him the confidence to not only attend the SAARC meeting in Islamabad but also initiate a personal dialogue with Musharraf.

It is now obvious that the Congress is no longer the pole around which politics, particularly electoral politics, in the country revolves. Despite retaining its position as the party with the largest (close to 30%) vote share, the Congress has steadily lost both geographic and social space. Alongside losing power in much of the periphery, its position in the heartland too has now become tenuous. It may still represent a rainbow social coalition but has lost significant sections of the upper castes to the BJP, the OBCs to a variety of state specific formations, Muslims to the Samajwadi Party and dalits to the BSP. December 2003 demonstrated for the first time a major erosion in its tribal base. All this may explain the party's sudden willingness to reconsider its position on alliances, as also the insistence on Sonia Gandhi as the leader of the anti-NDA coalition.

However, more than the confidence marking the BJP led NDA and the obvious despondency in the Con-

gress camp, the recent assembly elections point to other issues that party strategists and managers can ignore only at some cost. Foremost among them is the issue of alliances signalling a clear shift to coalition politics. Be it an attempt to forge a 'secular' or 'communal' alliance, nationally or with state specific variations, given that neither the BJP nor the Congress are in any position to come to power on their own at the Centre, there is need to pay greater attention to the role of smaller, region specific formations. Even though these recent elections were perceived as a direct, one on one, contest between the two major parties, the ability or otherwise to tie up with smaller players may explain the difference between victory and defeat, or minimally, the margins of victory.

In part, this may represent the trend towards a dilution of ideology. Even if one grants that issues of governance – what in Madhya Pradesh was called the *bijli, sadak, pani* factor – overshadowed those of Hindutva (Article 370, Uniform Civil Code, Ram Mandir) it appears that coalitions, formal or otherwise, were forged not among the like-minded but between those with complementary bases, success coming to those who could make the most extravagant promises to formations with the ability to deliver votes. Such as the BSP. Such instrumentalist calculations cannot portend a happy augury.

An inordinate attention has been paid in post-poll analysis to the importance of electoral management, in particular the focus on marginal, 'at risk' constituencies where the swing of a few thousand votes can mean victory or defeat. Evidently, a concentration of resources – money, leadership time, cadres, customized advertising, and so on – can pay rich dividends, symptomatic of the green revolution strategy in agriculture. Once institutionalised, this may well imply a paradigm shift in the electioneering process, with large rallies giving way to localized campaigns.

We also need to examine the implications of the new regulations requiring each candidate to file affidavits disclosing financial assets, 'criminal' record and education status. Did this have any impact on the selection of candidates, particularly by recognised political parties? Even more on the results? Preliminary analysis, however, suggests that the objective of reducing the influence of money and muscle power was only minimally met. Nevertheless, what is heartening

is the growing involvement of civil society groups and individuals, normally seen as alienated from the electoral process, in exercising the 'right to information', assessing and analysing the disclosure data and trying to inform/educate voters in an effort to influence choice in favour of 'cleaner' and 'better' representatives. If this process gathers strength it can only improve the content of our electoral democracy.

As we approach the impending Parliament polls, we need to debate not only the lessons of the recent assembly elections but also larger, possibly abstract, questions relating to our elections and democracy. Both the extent and composition of turnout seems to suggest that even as the poorer and more marginalized strata continue to enthusiastically participate in elections, the better-off, educated voters seem far less involved. Many now look upon the political class as a whole as venal, a 'cancer' in the words of our current straight-talking Chief Election Commissioner, more apt to subserve personal than general interest. Equally, the tendency towards 'anti-incumbency' indicates that even if faith in democracy and elections has not diminished, the same cannot be claimed for specific politicians and parties, with a large proportion of 'sitting' representatives facing defeat. And even though this may impel parties to continually field 'fresh' candidates (a welcome development?), many even winning, the disillusionment with the process can no longer be hidden.

The immense stakes in victory underlying the intensity with which elections are fought suggest that politics and governance is increasingly being judged by only one criterion – victory. This not only undermines the possibility of rulers taking tough decisions – reducing the fiscal deficit, downsizing government, introducing reforms in the labour market, shutting down unproductive enterprises – but impels politicians across party lines towards populist policies, as witnessed in the recent sops announced by the finance minister. More troubling is the fact that policies and programmes which, though socially useful (education guarantee, watershed development, barefoot health workers) but enjoying low electoral salience, at least in the short run, will continue to be neglected. This, after all, was the plaintive complaint of a Digvijay Singh or Ashok Gehlot.

Of equal concern is the downgrading of ideology. Even though our public discourse is overly dominated

by the words 'secular' and 'communal', relating these terms to specific political parties and individuals has become increasingly difficult, what with every political formation to varying degrees foregrounding identities rather than interests. On most other policies and practice, it is difficult to distinguish one coalition from another. Is this why both the NDA and the 'secular' front are willing to accommodate parties that they have otherwise little in common with? Has the logic of arithmetical alliances overtaken concerns of policies and programmes?

It is unclear in which manner the 2004 elections will mark a watershed in our political life. Will, for instance, the victory of the BJP led NDA coalition imply a consolidation of Hindutva forces, particularly if the weight of the BJP increases? For whatever the other 'achievements' of the Vajpayee regime, and there are many, this phase has witnessed not only the horrific 'pogrom' of Gujarat, a continuing campaign against minorities and a rise of majoritarian intolerance, but also an erosion of many of our institutions of education and culture. The issue is no longer whether the Congress was any less sectarian/communal, even if episodically, but whether the institutions of the state can uphold constitutional, republican values and laws. It is symptomatic that despite appeals to *Rajdhama*, the senior BJP leadership has done little to rein in Narendra Modi or even the VHP/Bajrang Dal. Neither the 'India shining' campaign nor the 'feel good' factor can hide the widespread unease with the steady unravelling of the Indian republic, in particular our future as an open, tolerant and law abiding society.

Fortunately, elections in our country still represent an open-ended contest. Alliances, micro-management and ad campaigns may improve the probability, they cannot guarantee success. Our political class has still to come to terms with a changing India – a young, mobile, urban, consumerist and globally aware electorate. Or even that we are 'many Indias', with issues and personalities perceived very differently in different contexts. There is also a simmering discontent with politicians and political parties, an urge for reducing the overload on politics and of politics in our everyday life. This issue of *Seminar* attempts to go beyond the recent verdict in an effort to engage with the emerging concerns of elections and democracy.

Is the party over?

MAHESH DAGA

PERCEPTION has it that India's grand old party is dying. The debacle in the recent state elections has dealt it a fatal blow. Diehard supporters won't admit this in public, but behind closed doors they are in a state of extended mourning. Post Gujarat, the Himachal victory gave the party a temporary lease of life, but all it can now look forward to is a decent burial.

Contrast this with another perception, from no more than eight or ten months ago. The time when it was immensely more interesting to talk about Vajpayee's health than his leadership. The time when Atalji could do no right. Gujarat, Kashmir, Ayodhya, Pakistan, economic reforms – there was hardly an area of politics or policy where he could be accused of strong leadership. Hostage to conflicting coalition interests and parivar pressures, he was a lame duck prime minister, too busy guarding his turf – also called PMO – to worry about questions of governance and legacy.

All we have left of that Vajpayee now is the name. In every other respect he has taken on a new *avatar*. Statesman, poet, strategist, philosopher, orator, reconciler of difference, maker of peace – the list of his putative virtues gets longer by the day. The 'doddering' old patriarch is the new 'deliverer'; the *mukhauta*, the mascot. Even his 'pause' is now 'patented'. And just in case you didn't grasp the import of this momentous discovery, it signifies, we are told, 'a new doctrine of passivity in political management.'

The moral: Public perception, in our times, is just another name for whatever it is that grabs the fancy of hacks and hustlers in the metropolitan media. Marx talked of capitalism as a destroyer of time. This destruction, it

seems, happens primarily through the instrumentality of the mass media. And at the end of it, there remains neither past nor memory, just the here and now. The moment is everything. Those who die today are reborn tomorrow. The gloom and doom that currently surrounds the Congress may not prove as fickle as the earlier mood of anticipation, but reality won't be the ultimate arbiter of whether that is so.

This is not to argue that the media perception of the Congress has no basis in fact, but to call for a reality check. If the party today is faced with a terminal crisis, it is not one that was brought about by the defeat in the recent polls. As India's pre-eminent political formation, the story of Congress' electoral decline is old. While the trend was already evident in 1989, it gathered rapid pace in the five years following the 1991 polls. In 1996, the all-India vote share of the party dropped to less than 30% for the first time in history. In the two general elections since, support for the party has more or less stabilized at that level. This, in other words, is not the story of a sudden life-threatening emergency. The Congress has been on the drip for a while now. That said, it's all too easy to forget that with all its ailments the party still has the largest vote share in the country.

The danger of over-interpreting the recent verdict arises from another quarter too. In the last two decades, few state governments in India have survived the 'iron law of anti-incumbency.' You can count the exceptions on the fingers of one hand. Aside from the Left Front in Bengal, universally acknowledged as a case by itself, there is the BJP in Gujarat, Laloo's RJD in Bihar, the Congress in Madhya Pradesh

and, lately, in Delhi and, of course, Naidu's TDP in Andhra Pradesh. (The last instance is somewhat different from the rest not only because Chandrababu had a truncated first term but also because his subsequent victory was largely on account of a savvy electoral pact).

There is a common thread that runs through this: the deepening of our 'electoral' democracy (the qualification is necessary, because in other respects India has become less democratic). With more and more marginalized and excluded social groups entering the political process, the demands on the system, both party and state, have multiplied. Two consequences have followed. First, a great deal of political churning and re-alignment. With 'mainstream' parties, especially the Congress, unable or, more accurately, unwilling to accommodate these new groups, almost all states have seen the emergence of new political players – from predominantly 'one-caste' parties to broader-based social coalitions.

Second, it has set up an inverse correlation between social expectations on the one hand and the state's ability to deliver on the other. The fragmentation resulting from the first has made the polity less stable. The frustration arising from the other has made governments less secure. The two together have usually been enough to vote out incumbent regimes. Politics has become a less forgiving place. There is a silver-lining here for the Congress: it has no incumbency liability in the Lok Sabha polls.

Then there is the disconnect between general and state-level elections. The Indian electorate may or may not have come of age, but it often votes differently in assembly and parliamentary polls. For proof, one has to look no further than the states where

the Congress had, just recently, fared so poorly. In the state-level elections in the then undivided Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan in 1998, the BJP faced a rout. In the Lok Sabha elections held there not long after, the party staged a spectacular comeback.

Consider also a little arithmetic. Last time round, the BJP, with or without allies, had peaked in almost all states where the NDA can expect to do well this time. From Gujarat (20/26) to Orissa (19/21), from Andhra Pradesh (35/42) to Bihar (40/54), from Delhi (7/7) and Haryana (10/10) to Madhya Pradesh (29/40), Rajasthan (16/25) and Maharashtra (28/48). Among the major states, Uttar Pradesh alone bucked the trend, with the BJP falling well short of the half-way mark. Given the current state of the BJP in UP, even assuming that Kalyan Singh will join the party, that figure is unlikely to change much. As for other lesser battles, there is, realistically, only one way for the BJP-led front to go: down.

The reasons which should worry the Congress are not adequately reflected in the big picture – the loss of three states. The devil, as always, lies in the detail. Of all the theories that have been invoked to explain the Congress defeat, there are two whose ramifications are far-reaching and will influence the course of the next parliamentary polls. The more enduring of the two is the question of logistics. While this covers a range of issues, from media management to fund raising, space constraints will limit us to what is rather a small part of it – the decline of the Congress as an organization; a development which goes back to Mrs G's time, but which has, in the past decade, begun to take a far graver toll on the party's fortunes.

In traditional theory, organization was seen to be important to the Congress in three ways. In an earlier

issue of *Seminar* (526, June 2003), James Manor outlined these as 'gathering and transmitting accurate information upwards, representing the views of important social groups, and arranging political bargains with and between those groups.' While these reasons remain valid, the experience of recent polls indicates that organizational strength is critical in other ways too. From careful checking of electoral rolls, to mobilization of supporters on polling day, it can often prove the difference between victory and defeat. Indeed, the phrase 'micro management' – much bandied about in the wake of BJP's recent win – would have made no sense had the Congress mobilised the organizational resources required to deal with this electoral minutiae.

In Rajasthan, almost a fifth of the assembly seats were decided by a margin of less than 1,000 votes. A majority of these went to the BJP, thanks to the organizational muscle of the RSS. Admittedly, the Congress was never a cadre-based party, but it was never so lacking in institutional presence as to hire daily wage earners for 'booth management', even in parts of the state capital Jaipur. No one can say the Congress does not know the way out of this. The key, as many have argued, lies in democratizing the party and holding organizational polls. But even with Sonia's preference for regional autonomy, the task looks a little beyond the party leadership, at least in the near future.

Then there is the breach in the party's tribal citadel. The extent of the loss is staggering – every four out of five tribal seats at stake. No anti-incumbency feeling can explain the BJP's wholly unexpected windfall (an unprecedented 77 tribal seats out of 99). Compare this to the last general elections, when the support for the Congress among the tribals remained

at a solid 40% (11% more than its overall vote share) despite its otherwise poor showing. Had the Congress managed to hold on to its tribal vote, the results would have been significantly different.

Et might still have lost Rajasthan, but perhaps not Chhattisgarh. The credit for the BJP's achievement belongs almost entirely to the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, a Sangh outfit which has employed the oldest fascist trick – the ‘social service’ model – to build up a formidable network of local support. Like fascist organizations elsewhere in the world, it has bridged the infrastructural blackhole left by an absent state with its own delivery of health-care, literacy and ideological training.

The implications of this go far. The Congress, it is well-known, is no longer a ‘rainbow coalition’ or ‘catch-all’ party, which draws ‘the same level of support from all sections of society.’ It is, in Yogendra Yadav’s phrase, now a ‘cleavage-based’ party, which, except in states like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, has little support among those at the top of the social and economic pyramid. It draws its sustenance largely from social and religious minorities located at the other end. While the better-off among the dalits and scheduled tribes have moved on to greener (and saffron) pastures – the BJP in the North and the West and regional parties elsewhere – the poor have, by and large, stayed put. The Congress cannot afford any erosion in this support.

So how does the Congress deal with this challenge? Depending on the time frame one chooses, there are, I think, at least two answers. But first a word about the history that has brought the Congress to its present predicament. While the precise starting point for this history can be a matter of some debate, there can be little doubt about the real moment of crisis. Support for

the Congress was falling for a long time, but the downward curve hit a point of inflection during the Rao-Manmohan era of liberalization. The middle class which this gave birth to has inflicted the greatest wounds on the party. A revolution, it has been said, devours its own children. The Congress has been devoured by the children of its own revolution.

In the immediate analysis, the Congress has no hope of bringing the prodigals back to the fold. It must, therefore, turn its attention to those whose loyalty it still commands. The challenge facing the Congress, in other words, is about putting in place a clear pro-poor agenda. It is one of working towards alliances with those political parties which have already enlisted these impoverished sections. It is about giving leaders representing such groups a higher profile and visibility in the party set-up.

But, most of all, it is about recognizing that this country has moved into a new political reality, namely, ‘the post-Congress polity.’ In the foreseeable future, the party cannot return to power on its own. Even with the backing of the poor and the marginalized, it can, at best, emerge as the single largest bloc around which other like-minded groups can coalesce. There is simply no escape from coalitions. And if that means renouncing the prime ministerial claims of Sonia Gandhi, then so it must be.

The economic story of the last five years presents the Congress with a wide window of opportunity. India may be shining brightly for its rich urban denizens, but in the countryside they haven’t felt the warmth much. This may be a year of good monsoon, but the longer-term picture in the farm sector is dismal, with productivity stagnant, investments tapering off, and the prices of agricultural produce

falling. The latest NSS survey, for 2001-2 – and this, remember, was not a drought year; agriculture in this period grew at a healthy 5.2% – paints a picture of widespread rural misery. Apart from the widening gap between urban and rural consumption, there are fully 33 million or 3.3 crore new entrants to the poverty list. Add to this the inability of India’s organized sector to create new jobs, over several years, and the ground is ready for Sonia’s ‘fail-good’ pitch.

That still leaves us with an intriguing final question. Can the Congress, in the long run, remain content with being the party of have-nots? Should it turn its back totally on the middle classes, which it once tried to woo – but without much success? The answer, I believe, is no. First, because liberalization (or, more accurately, LPG – liberalization-privatization-globalization) is now more than a *fait accompli*. It is an irreversible process. Across the world, it has rewritten the old rules of state sovereignty. You can of course determine its pace and priorities. But as a mainstream political party in government, you cannot take a blanket ideological position against it. Swimming against the tide may look heroic but it is also hopeless. (This is of course assuming that LPG is the kind of unmitigated evil that many on the Left believe it is. It isn’t.)

Second, the place to fight the rightward shift in the Indian polity – best understood in the context of an identical historical movement across much of the world – is at the Centre. Anti-market rhetoric as part of tactical flexibility can occasionally be useful, especially if you sit on the opposition benches, but as a credible economic blueprint or long-term political strategy it has no future.

In India, there is an additional factor to consider. In absolute and per-

centage terms, the country's middle class is, and will remain, a small minority for a long time to come, but it has assumed – some would argue, it has always had – a cultural-ideological leadership role which is far in excess of its size. Call it India's Sanskritisation imperative, but this influence – thanks to the proliferation of the media – is set to grow. The Congress cannot afford to be out of the loop while that happens. In the past decade, the party has had precious little success in courting the middle class. Can it do anything different to avoid a similar humiliation in the future?

Bread or circus. Interests or ideology. Pragmatism or passion. What is it that ultimately sells in the great Indian election bazaar? There is, alas, no one answer. Most winning formulas are based on a clever braiding of the two. Neither bread nor circus, on its own, is usually enough. (There are exceptions. Think of Gujarat 2002. But even in his obsession with Mian Musharraf, Modi found time to talk of the Narmada waters.)

Much has been said about the role of Advani's 1991 *rath yatra* in the BJP's spectacular march to Delhi. What has not been said as often is that the Ramjanambhoomi movement was, above all, a great political circus. Advani's Toyota rath was the vehicle which took it to every important town and city in the Hindi heartland.

On second thoughts, the circus metaphor is perhaps too antiquated to capture the rhythms of India's post-liberalization polity. A more probable metaphor for contemporary popular and political culture – if I am allowed a little speculation – is that of a motion picture. The roots of the BJP's success since the late 1980s lies in its ability to transform itself into something like a live celluloid drama. Star cast and storyline, song and dance, heroes, villains and vamps, soppy sentimenta-

lity and smug morality – watching the BJP in the last decade and a half has been like watching a Bollywood blockbuster. It is aesthetically poor, intellectually undemanding, politically regressive, but, for many Indians, it's compelling. Compared to this lowbrow entertainment, the Congress has the feel of a grainy period classic. Old timers may thrill to its sense of nostalgia. But for the India on the go, it's cold turkey.

For two hundred years, the upper caste Hindu has lived with an immense sense of his own lack, thanks to the bruising historical encounter with the all-powerful other – the colonizing West. This anxiety – too painful to acknowledge, too powerful to disown – has lived with him ever since. It has occasionally found expression in the form of self-irony, even self-hatred. But mostly it has been raised as an interrogative: The question, why did (Hindu) India fail as a nation, culture or civilization?

The Hindutva script – combining narratives of (past and present) Hindu victimhood with exhortations of (imminent or future) glory, think of 'India shining' – is an extended answer to that haunting question. You can hear its distant echoes in figures as diverse as Bankim and Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Tilak (quite apart from the Hindutva pantheon, Savarkar onwards). Hindutva may not have a pedigree, it has a long past. The reason it never got top billing earlier was because it had to contend with alternative and competing storylines – the one authored by Nehru being the principal one. But with the latter losing viewership, its TRP ratings have soared.

The strength of Hindutva lies in that it, superficially, masquerades as a rational argument, seemingly open to debate and denial. But, in actual fact, it is what Freud might have called

dream work or discursive displacement. And as dreams go, it is far removed from reality. This is not surprising. Because anxieties, as any shrink will tell you, have no rational resolutions, whether they afflict the individual or a whole collectivity. That is why Hindutva is ultimately not about self-assurance but self-importance, not about acceptance of self but rejection of the other, not about quiet pride but exaggerated conceit.

The Congress failed to lure India's new middle class because it tried to do so on terms set by the BJP. This is partly because, by the mid-80s, it had lost much of its earlier conviction in Nehru. But also because Nehru's grand narrative was written for a different time, space and society. It urgently needed updating and improvising.

The Congress lacked the ingenuity to fill up the gaps that appeared. Faced with a vacuum of its own and threatened by a rampaging BJP, it was forced to borrow – some times hesitantly, often shamelessly – from the enemy's repertoire. Digvijay Singh's attempt in Madhya Pradesh is only the most recent example of such imitation. Call it a remake or a remix, but the result, going by the evidence, hasn't been a hit.

The only way the Congress can win over the affections of the middle class, or sections of it, is for it to come up with a script of its own. But while doing so, it must find a way of addressing the elemental anxiety which Hindutva has so powerfully exploited and encashed. To think that the gaudy exuberance of Hindutva can be countered with gritty documentaries of development, governance and injustice is to grossly misunderstand the nature of the box office. Think of a Bollywood potboiler without songs. An Ankur or Aakrosh is no match for the runaway success of K3G.

The Congress defeat in Madhya Pradesh

JAMES MANOR

AFTER ten years in power, the Congress Party was soundly thrashed in Madhya Pradesh. On the highest turnout in the state's history (67.41%), the BJP won a huge majority of 171 seats out of 228 declared (74.6%). The Congress, which had won a modest but stable majority of the seats at the last election in 1998, ended up with just 39.¹ It suffered serious losses in every region except the Gwalior-Chambal division, but even there it only matched its poor 1998 showing by winning 9 of 38 seats. The BJP received 42.6% of the vote, a small increase of 3.7% over 1998. But the Congress share plummeted by 8.8% to 31.8%, mainly because it lost votes to smaller parties

which fragmented the remaining 25.6%.²

The BJP outpolled Congress in all social groups except *adivasis* (among whom Congress' traditional advantage shrank drastically to 2%),

small shares of the state-wide vote, but they damaged Congress in every sub-region except Malwa.

Digvijay Singh wanted to make pre-poll alliances with minor parties. But although the Congress had committed itself at Shimla to such alliances, he was told that this applied only at the national level. The same thing happened and may have deprived Congress of a majority in Rajasthan. *Economic Times*, 13 December 2003. Salman Khurshid's post-election claim that 'the CMs' opposed alliances (*Outlook*, 15 December 2003, p. 40) is thus inaccurate. The high command is to blame.

The 'understanding' of the Congress with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) did not prevent the BSP from taking vital votes from Congress. The Samajwadi Party (SP) unexpectedly hurt Congress in many seats – and once Congress had an 'understanding' with the BSP, agreement with the SP became impossible. In the six constituencies of the Gond tribal belt, the Gondwana Ganatantra Party (GGP) polled between 22% and 39% of the votes – even though its state-wide share was under 2%. The GGP won only one seat there, but damaged Congress. *Hindustan Times* (Bhopal) 7 and 8 December 2003. The RSS and BJP had been assisting/funding the GGP for a long period to undercut Congress. Interview, Askari Zaidi, Bhopal, 5 December 2003.

1. The Election Commission of India's website – www.eci.gov.in, and CSDS analyses. (Two seats remain officially undeclared at this writing, which news agencies awarded to the BJP.) The comparison between this and the 1998 elections – if we only consider seats remaining in the state after the creation of Chhattisgarh are:

	1998	2003
Congress	124	39
BJP	83	171
Others	23	18

2. CSDS election study in *The Hindu*, 10 December 2003, and *Hindustan Times* (Bhopal) 6 December 2003. Minor parties drew only

Muslims and *dalits*. Among numerically powerful OBCs, the BJP won 50% of the votes, against 26% for Congress. 22% of those who supported Congress in 1998 swung to the BJP, while the latter lost only 8% of its 1998 votes to Congress.³

Media assessments focused almost exclusively on two issues: roads and power (electricity). The BJP (guided by private polls) constantly emphasised these things, but this explanation oversimplifies grossly. Roads and especially power were extremely important, but their main role was in crystallising the significant but initially rather unfocused discontent with the Congress government. To understand this election adequately, we must explain the origins of that discontent. They lie in the political structures crafted by Chief Minister Digvijay Singh – which unintentionally led to poor government performance (that inspired discontent), blinded him to much of it, and prevented him from tackling it effectively.

Political structures and popular discontent:⁴ Given the BJP landslide, it is important to stress that discontent with the government was significant but far from total. A private BJP poll in August/September found that 55% of respondents thought that the government was ‘poor’, but 45% regarded it as ‘good’ or ‘okay’.⁵ A November poll in *The Week* reported that 39% saw the government as good,

3. CSDS election study in *The Hindu*, 10 December 2003. I am especially grateful to the CSDS election team for sharing details of their findings.

4. Given limitations on space, this section is presented with extreme brevity. A detailed analysis of these issues will appear in a book on Brazil, Uganda and Madhya Pradesh, being written by Marcus Melo, Njuguna Ng’ethe and this writer.

5. Society for Development of Humanity, Jabalpur, ‘MP Pre-Election V(idhan) S(abha) Study’, p. xiii.

37% as poor and 19% as average. Views of the chief minister were almost identical.⁶ These are not damning numbers. Discontent intensified by polling day, but only somewhat – 49.2% were not satisfied with the work of the government, and 35.6% were satisfied.⁷

Voters saw the BJP as better able than Congress to tackle *only one* problem – ‘infrastructure’ – whereas Congress was seen as better at tackling their other *four* main concerns (‘unemployment’, ‘communal harmony’, ‘religious interests’ and ‘price rise’). Unfortunately for Congress, 45% of respondents rated infrastructure as most crucial – while the other topics *combined* drew comment from only 35%.⁸

But if the discontent had clear limits, it was still sufficient to send the government down to a severe defeat. To understand it, we must examine the evolution of political structures in the state over the previous decade. Other things mattered too, but this was the core problem.

When Digvijay Singh considered how to make his influence penetrate down into society and how to obtain information from below, he had three main options. First, he could have developed accommodations with civil society organisations. After exploratory overtures during his first term, he largely⁹ rejected this option. Second, he could have built up his party’s organisation. But to do so was to

6. Other respondents offered no opinion. *The Week*, 30 November 2003, p. 39.

7. The CSDS exit poll.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 38. The CSDS exit poll found that 65% saw power/roads as the main problem, which dwarfed all others. *The Hindu*, 10 December 2003.

9. The main exception was the *Ekta Parishad*, a Gandhian organisation pressing for land rights for poor people – with which Singh developed an understanding as the 2003 election approached.

risk both factional strife which he had largely contained, and unwelcome interventions from national-level Congress leaders. He therefore rejected this too.

This left him only one choice – to work through the formal state machinery, and through official programmes. He did this vigorously and developed a remarkable array of imaginative, sometimes visionary initiatives derived from the sort of arguments advanced by Amartya Sen. Some were routed through conventional bureaucratic channels, but several were pursued through special administrative instruments – Rajiv Gandhi Missions – that bypassed ministries which he regarded as inefficient or in some cases unsympathetic. The chief minister dominated policy design, assisted by picked civil servants and advisors. Other ministers and legislators (MLAs) played little or no role.

The great danger in relying on official channels was that he might be left with too little information – on what was happening, and on how ordinary people saw things – from sources other than MLAs and bureaucrats. For a time, he had a major alternative source of political intelligence from within the government – the members and chairpersons of *zilla panchayats*. Those people also had some power to tackle bureaucrats who were performing poorly.¹⁰ But in April 2001, a system of ‘District Government’ was introduced which – as it evolved¹¹ –

10. It has been clearly established that when district-level panchayats are generously empowered, they can play these roles. See the discussion of Karnataka in R. Crook and J. Manor, *Democracy and Development in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998). A discussion with the head of the Madhya Pradesh zilla panchayat chairpersons association in Sehore, 22 March 2002, plainly indicated that they had played this role there as well.

disempowered zilla panchayats and made district ministers and collectors dominant at that level. Senior government spokesmen presented this change as a step forward for democratic decentralisation, but that is the opposite of the truth.

This action, which was taken to placate MLAs and ministers who were jealous of zilla panchayat members' powers, was politically unwise because it infuriated those members – who might otherwise have lent crucial electoral support. Digvijay Singh certainly suffered at the 2003 election from their continuing anger. But even more damaging was the destruction of his only major alternative source of political intelligence. Because officials often sent him rosy reports, he was flying blind for his last 22 months in power. He was acutely aware of the state's problems with power and roads, but he was badly under-informed about wider discontent caused by under-performance of the bureaucracy (especially at lower levels).

The disempowerment of zilla panchayats also deprived him of allies at lower levels who – if they had remained influential – could have tackled bureaucratic shortcomings.¹² In other words, his excessive dependence on collectors, police superintendents, district ministers and MLAs – who forged tight alliances at the district level – bred discontent, and undermined his capacity to see it and to tackle it. Other things also influenced the outcome. Let us consider them.

Power, roads – and water: The BJP began by stressing its mantra, *bijli, sadak, pani* (electricity, roads, water).

11. Digvijay Singh did not initially intend zilla panchayat members to lose so much power. But a nexus between collectors, district ministers, police superintendents and MLAs soon developed and excluded others. Interviews with three knowledgeable sources, Bhopal, 5, 6 and 10 December 2003.

It soon de-emphasised water because this was not a negative issue for Congress, except in one specific sense. Had the election been conducted a year earlier, after several years of drought, water would have loomed large. But the good monsoon of 2003 had eased the extreme shortages and – more to the point – the government's energetic *pani roko* programme to capture water had been reasonably successful. Roughly half of the minor works constructed had survived, so when this year's rains arrived, adequate water for drinking and for crops was available.¹³

The key problem was that to convey water to fields, most farmers needed power for electric pumps. Power cuts impeded that process, so farmers faced an excruciating irony. Water was (at last) available, but they could not deliver enough of it to their crops.¹⁴ This called further attention to the much more important issue of power, which already caused acute resentment.¹⁵

Madhya Pradesh would not have faced serious power shortages had the Chhattisgarh government not denied it access to electricity which it

12. Another major change in January 2002, the introduction of *gram swaraj* (direct democracy at the village level), curtailed the power of village *sarpanches*. This also alienated key potential election supporters of the Congress at the grassroots, but it was less important than the imposition of District Government in damaging information flows to the chief minister.

13. Voters repeatedly told interviewers that drinking water was not a problem, thanks to the *pani roko* programme. See for example, *Central Chronicle* (Bhopal), 2 December 2003.

14. The CSDS exit poll found 66.2% of respondents rated drinking water supply the 'same as' or 'better than' before, while 32.0% rated it 'worse than before'. But irrigation facilities were seen as 'worse' by 30.7%, 'same' by 30.7% and 'better' by 15.0%.

15. The CSDS exit poll found that electricity supply was seen as 'worse than before' by 78.9%, 'same' by 13.3% and 'better' by 6.9%.

had consumed before the bifurcation of the two states in November 2000. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Ajit Jogi, like Digvijay Singh, was a Congressman. But owing to a long-standing feud between the two men, Jogi refused power to Madhya Pradesh in the same extravagantly aggressive way that he over-centralised within his state and wrecked his prospects of re-election.¹⁶ (He also failed to honour other aspects of the bifurcation agreement, denying Madhya Pradesh substantial resources to which it was entitled.)

Digvijay Singh could not blame Jogi too loudly, because that would raise questions about why Sonia Gandhi did not intervene on behalf of his state. Her failure to do so, despite repeated appeals, was a breathtaking error that caused huge damage to her party in Madhya Pradesh.¹⁷ This was also patently obvious to many. On 5 December, an autorickshaw driver in Bhopal stated that victory for the BJP in the two states meant that the party's national leaders would soon have power flowing from Chhattisgarh.

Sonia Gandhi's inaction persuaded several (but not all) perceptive observers in Bhopal that she wanted Digvijay Singh to lose (alongside victories in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan). They reckoned that he was the most serious alternative to her as prime minister in a hung Parliament after the 2004 election, if other parties refuse to support Congress with her as premier.¹⁸ If they are correct, this is the

16. For a useful, detailed analysis of this, see *Hindustan Times*, 5 December 2003.

17. Mrs. Gandhi was warned twice about Jogi's damaging behaviour by the official Congress observer, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh – and she was further warned even by a senior figure in the NDA, probably Brajesh Mishra, speaking for the Prime Minister. *Hindustan Times* (Bhopal), 8 December 2003 and *Economic Times*, 15 December 2003.

first state election in India's history in which national leaders of both major parties sought to demolish their own state-level leadership (for the BJP, see below).

The state government made strenuous efforts to ease the power shortage as the election neared. It diverted scarce funds from other sectors to purchase some from other states. It also developed a crash programme for a hydroelectric project, set to come on stream a month before polling day, but it was delayed by two months. Digvijay Singh could only promise full power 'by 2005' – an inadequate response to constant BJP denunciations on this issue.

Resentment also developed against charges for power introduced by the state government. (Non-payment often meant loss of supply.) Charges had less impact than the problem of supply, but they sharpened discontent over shortages because voters who now got less power also had to pay.¹⁹

On roads, the state government was more culpable. After being re-elected in 1998, Digvijay Singh promised action on roads 'within six months' – but his government was slow to act. By early 2002, it was clear that the government was acutely vulnerable on roads.²⁰ Significant funds were committed to road building during the 18 months before the election, but they left it late, and pro-

18. Those who take this view point to speeches during the campaign by Arjun Singh – former chief minister of the state, and now an advisor to Sonia Gandhi's circle. He apologised for the Congress government's failure to provide power, and thereby focused blame on the chief minister. The BJP made much of this.

19. The Election Commission prevented Digvijay Singh from waiving electricity bills since 2001 for farmers and the urban poor in the weeks before polling day.

20. This is based on interviews with leading bureaucrats and Congress politicians in Bhopal in March 2002.

gress was slowed by disputes with contractors and heavy rains during the 2003 monsoon.²¹

But if the government was responsible for the roads problem, it had made substantial progress on water – and on power, it was a victim of Congress leaders outside the state.

The selection of Congress candidates: The chief minister prevailed in most decisions about Congress candidates. This angered other senior Congressmen – Kamal Nath openly dissociated himself from the process. Some curtailed support for the campaign. There was also a second problem. Digvijay Singh knew that at the 1998 election, many sitting MLAs – in both major parties – had been defeated. Anti-incumbency feeling at constituency level was an extremely potent force.²² He escaped severe damage then by dropping 41% of his MLAs, but in 2003, he only dropped 16%.²³ In the event, a huge proportion of incumbent Congress MLAs were defeated, as were approximately two-thirds of ministers. Even BJP incumbents suffered. Despite the landslide, roughly one quarter were ousted. The chief minister persisted with so many legislators because he feared damage from factional strife and rebel candidates if he changed many faces. He was probably mistaken.

Digvijay Singh and Uma Bharti: Long before the election, Digvijay Singh had hoped to get Uma Bharti as

21. The CSDS exit poll found that the condition of roads was seen as 'worse than before' by 62.0%, 'same' by 16.7% and 'better' by 19.3%.

22. It has been underestimated. The CSDS exit poll found that 40.3% of respondents gave the greatest importance to the candidates, against 12.7% who stressed stage government performance.

23. *India Today*, 17 November 2003, p. 39. He did so partly under pressure from senior state Congress leaders, some of whom largely sat out the campaign.

the BJP's campaign leader, mainly because he believed that her emotional volatility would stand in stark contrast to his own unflappability. The BJP obliged by imposing her, in order to marginalise its old-line leadership in Madhya Pradesh (as in Rajasthan).²⁴

Singh tried to exploit this by suggesting a televised debate with her, but the BJP proposed India's Law Minister Arun Jaitley instead. A poorly briefed Jaitley had made embarrassing misstatements on an earlier visit, so the chief minister – anticipating more such slips – agreed to the debate. When it occurred, however, Jaitley was extremely well prepared and in top debating form. At one point, he had Digvijay Singh fumbling for a reply to a point on poverty rates. Viewers who had never seen their chief minister at a loss found their confidence shaken by this.²⁵ Meanwhile Uma Bharti avoided the fire-breathing *hindutva* themes for which she is famous – focusing on power, roads and appeals to fellow OBCs and women.

Ameticulously managed BJP – or rather, RSS – campaign: It is impossible to overstate the meticulous character of the BJP's campaign. This writer gained access to a pre-election strategic survey of the state, developed for the BJP by professional analysts at a think tank. In 31 years of studying state elections, he has seen

24. I am grateful to Amitabh Singh for stressing this point. The RSS pressed for Uma Bharti in order to side-line state BJP leaders, and retained huge influence after the election. She chose her small cabinet 'after extensive consultations with the RSS leadership.' This meant that 'very few of the remaining [non-RSS] factions have got representation in the list.' *Hindustan Times* (Bhopal), 8 December 2003.

25. This is based on numerous discussions with a diversity of people who witnessed the debate, Bhopal, 3–10 December 2003.

26. 'MP Pre-Election V(idhan).S(abha). Study.'

nothing to rival it. It runs to 452 pages, excluding an extensive introduction and annexes. It contains extremely detailed information – constituency by constituency – on caste composition, local conditions and problems, other parties, voters' perceptions, and the party's chances of winning.²⁶ The BJP used this formidable resource systematically in candidate selection and throughout the campaign.

But to call this a 'BJP campaign' is misleading. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) played the pre-eminent role – which was essential to victory, especially but not only in tribal areas.²⁷ The view of one Bhopal editor that the BJP's organisation in the state is 'very weak' is widely shared.²⁸ A senior RSS leader stated that the party's organisation 'was in a messy state', so from mid-2002, 'the RSS took over the reins of the election'. It lobbied for Uma Bharti as campaign leader, strongly influenced candidate selection, and used its penetrative, cadre-based structure (which the BJP lacks) for canvassing.²⁹ The BJP's organisation in Madhya Pradesh is no stronger than that of the Congress (which is quite frail), but with the RSS involved, Congress was at a severe disadvantage.

27. There was a 14% swing in the tribal belt against Congress – greater than the state average. The RSS had been working in tribal areas for years, and it reportedly paid monthly stipends to 400-500 RSS activists in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh for six months prior to polling day, for full time election work. This was in addition to *swayamsevaks* who were already on the ground. *Economic Times*, 15 December 2003.

28. Interview with Pushpendra Solanki, Bhopal, 6 December 2003. Numerous interviews indicated that the BJP lacked analytical capacity, and that it was too distracted by *hindutva* in early 2003 to reach out to sarpanches who were unhappy about gram swaraj and to para-professional teachers seeking formal status as government employees.

Government employees' resentment: Uma Bharti won passionate support from among 500,000 Class II to IV state employees by promising to reverse unpopular decisions by the Congress government – the retrenchment of 28,000 daily employees, freeze on many promotions, non-payment of dearness allowances, etc. These measures were part of a fiscal stabilisation package which had kept the government from the near-bankruptcy that plagued many other states.³⁰ Government employees were correct in stating that much of the money saved went to pro-poor social programmes.³¹ The BJP gained substantial votes from employees as a result, but it will now struggle to avoid the fiscal havoc wrought by their last government in Maharashtra.

Five issues of which little was made:
- *Hindutva* – The BJP downplayed this issue, partly because it lacked salience with voters. Only 5% in one poll said that it would be an issue.³² But the chief minister also did much to neutralise it. No significant communal clash had occurred during his decade in power. His appeal to the prime min-

29. Interview with *kshetra pracharak* Narmohan, *Hindustan Times*, 6 December 2003. The words quoted are those of the reporter, summarising Narmohan's views. More than 172 BJP candidates had attended RSS *shakas* and retained ties to the organisation. The RSS proposed candidates for all but 60 seats, most of which were accepted. 'The entire media and election management was handled by RSS cadres.' One reason for the extensive involvement of the RSS was that VHP and Bajrang Dal members lent little support to the BJP in this election. *Central Chronicle* (Bhopal), 4 December 2003.

30. Interview with Planning Commission officials, New Delhi, 7 March 2003.

31. *Hindustan Times* (Bhopal), 6 December 2003.

32. Interview with two BJP organisers, Bhopal, 4 December 2003; and *The Week*, 30 November 2003, p. 38.

ister in early 2003 for more attention to cow protection had armed him with a telling rejoinder when accused of ignoring Hindu values. And when the arrest of a VHP incendiary for a communist speech produced no serious protest, Hindu extremists had been embarrassed. Voters in one poll rated the Congress as better able than the EJP to look after 'religious interests' (48% to 42%).³³ The BJP was shrewd to dodge this issue.

Panchayati raj – The chief minister referred in many speeches to democratic decentralisation, but the message was so familiar after nine years of panchayati raj that other things received more stress. Ironically, given that the state has achieved much in this sector by international standards, the BJP turned the issue partly against the Congress – by promising to abolish District Government if elected.

It is remarkable that Congress neutralised hindutva while the BJP neutralised panchayati raj in this election – but that is what happened.

Corruption – Uma Bharti emphasised corruption very occasionally, but mainly stressed the core themes of power and roads. BJP polls indicated that corruption failed to register among leading concerns of voters – even though corruption in the state government was serious.³⁴ So even before the Judeo tape was shown, the BJP had decided not to stress corruption.³⁵

33. Limited communal clashes occurred after polling in only one part of Indore, triggered by violence at one polling centre between Congress and BJP activists. A curfew was imposed, and normalcy was soon restored. *Central Chronicle*, 3 December 2003.

34. The CSDS study found that 61% saw the government as fully or somewhat corrupt. *The Hindu*, 10 December 2003.

35. *Hindustan Times* (Bhopal), 3 December 2003.

The Dalit Agenda: The state government had a more formidable programme for dalits than any in Indian history, after Digvijay Singh committed himself to all 21 recommendations of a dalit conference which he had convened. At the moment of decision, a visibly emotional chief minister told an aide that this was an issue worth risking electoral defeat upon.³⁶

There were, however, political dangers in relying entirely on the bureaucracy to pursue an agenda crafted by dalit intellectuals from outside the state. Most Congressmen were hostile, and dalit organisations within Madhya Pradesh scarcely existed. The BJP – which convened its own dalit conference – made little of this issue. But it is widely agreed that non-dalits – especially the numerically powerful OBCs – reacted negatively. A significant number of dalits obtained land, but the backlash from other groups, poor implementation in some areas, and unintended outcomes in others actually depressed dalit support for Congress.³⁷

The Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) – The state's extraordinary EGS, which provided schools to 26,571 habitations (and 12.33 lakh students) that had not had them before,³⁸ went uncriticised by the opposition. That is hardly surprising since the central government is developing a national programme on this model. (Nor were there complaints about state government initiatives to

train large numbers of para-professionals, akin to EGS teachers, to provide more services in other sectors.) Further research is needed to determine whether the EGS won many votes – the strong showing of the BJP in the tribal belt suggests that it did not – and whether para-professionals supported Congress.

Digvijay Singh's basic aims were to make government more responsive and to broaden the base of Congress. He decentralised powers to give people at the grassroots and their representatives influence over development projects. He increased the reach of government services, despite fiscal constraints, by training large number of para-professionals to deliver them. Some programmes (like panchayati raj) were intended for the population in general. Others (like the EGS and the Dalit Agenda) were aimed at stimulating demands from poorer groups who had previously made few claims on government, and at responding to those demands. Taken together – despite some failures and many ambiguities – these initiatives constitute an impressive developmental record.

They succeeded (as intended) in raising people's aspirations, but this entailed political dangers if aspirations were not met. By stressing social sectors, the government fell short on tangibles like roads, and in providing electricity (although others were mainly to blame for the latter). This enabled the BJP – using a very narrow definition of 'development' to imply power and roads – to argue that the government had failed. Some programmes were poorly implemented, but after the unwise imposition of district government, the chief minister could neither learn enough about this nor do much to tackle it. That was his fundamental problem and it mainly explains his defeat.

36. Interview with Amar Singh, Bhopal, 6 December 2003.

37. Dalits – who have recently given Congress less support here than in other states – gave Congress 31.4% of their votes (as against 37.6% in 1998), and 28% to the BJP, 19.2% to the BSP and 21.3% to others (the CSDS exit poll).

38. Interview with Amita Sharma, Bhopal, 4 December 2003.

Losing a winning hand

VIPUL MUDGAL

THE election result for the Rajasthan assembly surprised winners and losers alike. The BJP's most optimistic estimates were just under 100 seats for itself and around 80 for the Congress in the 200-member assembly. It is no secret that on counting day, senior BJP leaders had started sending feelers to 'like-minded' parties and independent candidates for 'negotiating' their support in order to form the government in the event of a hung assembly. The state electorate overwhelmed Raje by giving her 120 seats, reducing the ruling Congress tally to a mere 56 from a brute 153 in the last assembly.

Vasundhara Raje admitted that the extent of her party's victory surpassed her own expectations. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee too termed her triumph as a 'pleasant surprise' and most other senior BJP leaders in New Delhi echoed the sentiment. The results, once and for all,

put to rest all speculative comparisons between Raje and her predecessor, BJP stalwart from Rajasthan, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. Note that the BJP had never managed to cross the magic number of 100 even under Shekhawat's leadership.

The Congress leaders, particularly Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, had reasons to feel astounded. First, because there was no BJP wave in any part of Rajasthan and second, because Gehlot was regarded as a relatively 'clean' and pro-development leader. No credible political survey or opinion poll had suggested that either Gehlot or his government were facing a popular onslaught.

Gehlot was routed in his strongholds of Mewar and Marwar where caste and community equations were considered 'perfect' for the ruling party. And though the BJP gained in all regions, its major gains came from

the erstwhile Congress strongholds. Gehlot was seeking re-election on the strength of his government's efficient handling of drought relief operations, construction of new roads and commissioning of new power plants. Obviously, the Congress party either failed to convert its 'good work' into votes or Gehlot's best performance was just not good enough for the electorate.

Did the Congress party misjudge its time-tested caste and community calculations? The party's initial official explanation was that the high expectations of the electorate exceeded the state government's good performance. However, the state party leaders are now conceding that Gehlot and company's over-confidence and their lack of constituency-wise election strategy could have cost them this crucial election. So enamoured was the state party leadership with the slogan of their own good performance that they did virtually nothing to retain their traditional SC/ST and minority vote banks. The party now realizes, in retrospect, that this was the segment where it suffered major reverses.

Out of the state's 57 constituencies reserved for SC/ST candidates, the Congress had got 45 seats in 1998 elections with the BJP managing only four. This time the BJP won 42 of these seats, clearly signalling that the Congress cannot take the SC/ST support for granted. The BJP's gain in SC and ST constituencies was in excess of an impressive 23% and 13% respectively.

More worrisome for the Congress in Rajasthan is that despite the BSP's open resentment with the BJP (post their breakup in UP), it lost over 24% vote share in 33 constituencies reserved for SC candidates. It also lost 14% vote share among the state's 24 seats reserved for tribal candidates.

Though there were clear indications of a churning in tribal areas, Rajasthan's dalit voters were largely regarded as Congress supporters. It managed only five seats each in SC and ST constituencies, which is the party's most dismal performance ever. The BJP, in contrast, posted its best performance by securing 26 and 15 seats in seats reserved for SC and ST candidates respectively.

The Congress leadership failed to come up with a separate tribal action plan despite pre-election reports of increasing influence of Hindu organizations in almost all tribal areas. Gehlot relied largely on tokenism, fielding sitting tribal MLAs; the party neither propped up youth cadre from its ranks nor brought in influential tribal campaigners from other states. Going by cold numbers, the Congress still retains 30 to 35% of the tribal vote. However, its old loyalty is clearly waning, which should be a cause for worry in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections.

The Congress leadership's biggest mistake was re-nominating most MLAs despite clear signals that the electorate was angry with ministers and sitting MLAs. One of Gehlot government's schemes called 'desire system' was at the root of much of this resentment. (All transfers of government servants were routed through MLAs who often obliged for a 'consideration'.) This, when at one stage Gehlot was desperately trying to convince the high command that the only way to handle the imminent anti-incumbency factor was to change candidates.

In fact, in the first three months preceding the announcement of elections, the Congress election cell for Rajasthan discussed nothing but how to tackle the anti-incumbency factor. The initial proposal was to replace 70

MLAs, including about a dozen tainted ministers, with fresh candidates. The spectre of rebels harming official candidates finally prevailed and the idea of dropping controversial ministers and MLAs was shelved. (Gehlot could muster courage to remove only two ministers and a dozen odd MLAs but here too gave them the privilege of nominating close relatives as their successors). The party's inability to rein in the rebels exposed weaknesses inherent to its structure, a factor bound to haunt it in the Lok Sabha elections as well.

The number of sitting Congress MLAs who lost stands at 97 out of which 29 were ministers. This includes almost all senior ministers in Gehlot's cabinet. Rajasthan's new assembly has a record 60 new faces, mostly belonging to the BJP, which shows that the ruling party went wrong in its choice of candidates.

Region wise, the party could not retain its edge in its own strongholds mainly because it disregarded the local demand for new faces. Oddly enough, the Congress campaigns in most areas were conservative and lacked verve or innovation. Its main campaigners were Sonia Gandhi and Gehlot (with the exception of Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, who briefly visited three northern districts). In sharp contrast, the BJP brought in almost all central ministers and leaders of different caste groups from other states apart from several film stars.

Out of the 42 seats in Gehlot's stronghold of Marwar (western Rajasthan districts of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Jalore, Barmer, Pali, Sirohi and Nagaur) where his party had bagged 32 seats in the last elections, it could manage only nine seats this time. The BJP swapped positions with Congress by getting 32 seats against nine in

1998. An analysis of numbers shows that the Congress candidates losses and BJP candidates gains were mostly restricted to a narrow band of one to 5%, which translates into only a few thousand votes.

In the tribal dominated Mewar region (districts of Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara and Rajsamand) the Congress got only 10 seats as against 32 seats in the 1998 elections. Its over 60% traditional tribal vote share came down to well under 40% this time. The BJP secured 25 seats and its ally Janata Dal (United) got two seats in this region adjoining Gujarat. In other constituencies with a tribal presence (districts of Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar and Baran), the Congress lost 10 seats and the BJP gained eight. Compared to the Marwar region, the swing in BJP's favour was much larger in both Mewar and eastern Rajasthan, which clearly showed that a significant number of tribal voters had shifted loyalty.

The only consolation for the Congress is that despite losing many seats in the overall tally, it has not been wiped out in the Jat dominated areas as was earlier feared. The party fared better than the BJP in Alwar, Bharatpur and Dholpur districts even as the BJP gained new Jat votes in Shekhawati (Churu, Jhunjhunu and Sikar) and western Rajasthan (Barmer and Nagaur).

The BJP has got only half of the 52 seats where Jats have a significant presence. Although the Jat Mahasabha of Rajasthan had issued a so-called *fatwa* in favour of BJP, there is no evidence of its having worked. Navin Pilania, son of Jat Mahasabha President Gyan Prakash Pilania and Gangajal Meel, the brother of its General Secretary Rajaram Meel, both contesting as BJP candidates from relatively 'safe' constituencies, lost

elections despite the *fatwa*. Besides, more than a third of Jat voters ditched both Congress and the BJP in favour of members of the community contesting as independents or rebels.

The Rajasthan assembly election results show that despite conceding considerable ground to BJP, the Congress still retains its edge among SC/ST and OBC voters. Compared to the last elections, the BJP has succeeded in reducing that edge by a few percentage points almost uniformly. By fielding two Muslim candidates in Nagaur and Pushkar constituencies, it managed to chip away at the ruling party's last bastion, its Muslim vote bank.

Months before the elections in Rajasthan, the BJP strategists were sanguine about the possibility of an alliance with the BSP. At a time when the Congress was battling the prospects of dropping 60 to 70 sitting MLAs, it was felt that the BSP could have been persuaded to field Congress rebels as its official candidates. The plan, however, fell through when the BJP fell out with BSP in UP. This made the Gehlot camp even more complacent about its strong position among dalit voters.

Around the same time, the BJP was facing open rebellion in the party on the issue of providing reservation for the upper caste poor. The BJP's biggest traditional supporters, Brahmins and Rajputs, were up in arms against the party leadership and a powerful lobby finally broke away to form a pro-reservation Social Justice Front (SJF) under the leadership of Rajput heavyweight, Devi Singh Bhati. The party was also finding it difficult to placate the two upper caste voters after it projected itself as the benefactor of the Jats. (It was Prime Minister Vajpayee who had first mooted the idea of reservation for Jats at an election rally just before the last

Lok Sabha elections). The Congress party was, predictably, excited about the prospect of some upper caste voters deserting the BJP.

However, the BJP high command tackled the problem astutely. First, a new umbrella organization of Rajputs was floated to unseat Bhati and his supporters from the leadership of the community and then at his election rally Prime Minister Vajpayee announced that steps would be taken to ensure reservation on economic criterion, taking the wind out of the rebels' sails.

The BJP and RSS cadres took Vajpayee's message to towns and villages explaining that the PM was committed to reservation on economic criteria but was unable to do so because of inadequate numbers in Parliament. In all this, the Congress high command was consistently blamed for its double standards on the issue. (Gehlot was supporting a 14% reservation for the upper caste poor but the Congress parliamentary party had hardly followed up his promise on the floor of the house.) In the end the Congress was unable to cut into BJP's upper caste vote bank despite reports that it had offered material support to some rebel candidates from the upper castes.

The credit for getting the upper caste voters to finally support the BJP, though grudgingly, must go to the party's grassroot cadres in all constituencies. Similar tactics were employed to neutralize the Judeo factor in Rajasthan's urban areas where it could have become an issue. The Congress cadres, in sharp contrast, were either nowhere to be seen or too busy working for individual candidates, confined mainly to the issues of specific constituencies.

Rajasthan's nomads have an adage for their cattle: *Jo phirega so*

charega (One who roams will get to graze). BJP leader Vasundhara Raje literally applied the axiom to her campaign. She came as a reluctant leader of a divided and dispirited party but did not look back once she realised that there was no going back. She began her acclimatization with a *parivartan yatra* and covered hundreds of villages and suburbs by road in every region of Rajasthan.

Raje began by taking on the Hindutva brigade, her so called rivals in the state BJP – and even RSS – and on issues ranging from selecting the state party office-bearers to distribution of tickets, she emerged as her own person. (She also displayed the qualities of an astute politician by going back to the RSS and sangh parivar outfits on the eve of elections). Raje was aware that her opponent, Gehlot, presented a formidable challenge given his clean personal image and the government's good performance. She presented herself as BJP's liberal face and made development her main campaign issue. This eventually helped her win floating voters and fence-sitters, for whom Congress seemed to have no strategy whatsoever.

The Congress grossly underestimated the help Raje would get from the RSS front organisations such as Rajasthan Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad (RVKP) and Hindu Jagaran Manch that have been running schools, hostels and clinics in tribal areas. The RVKP is involved in the tuberculosis control programme and is running dozens of de-addiction camps, health centres, hostels with 50 to 70 students each, and hundreds of small primary schools in the tribal Dungarpur, Banswara and Udaipur districts.

The RVKP is also known for its aggressive *ghar wapasi* ('reconversion' of tribal Christians to Hinduism) with the help of allies such as Hindu

Jagaran Manch and Bajrang Dal. It had enrolled a large number of tribal activists for Ram Janmabhoomi campaign in Ayodhya and prepared cadres for BJP's election campaigns. It was from this area that Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi started his *sadbhawana yatra* right after the post Godhra riots and was quick to revisit for election rallies. The BJP was also helped in this region by hundreds of party activists from Gujarat.

Provocative speeches were often made in programmes organised by the Bajrang Dal activists in Jhalawar and Baran districts only weeks before the elections. One such incident in Iklera sub-division of Baran district turned violent and led to attacks on Muslims and ransacking of their houses. These were led by a known RSS activist, Kanwarlal Meena, who was declared as the BJP candidate from the nearby Khanpur constituency in the party's initial list. He was, however, denied a ticket in the final round.

Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal activists clashed violently with the police in Gangapur city in 2001 when they were prevented from disrupting a *tazia* procession. The clashes led to police firing resulting in the death of three people. Similar clashes took place in Iklera subdivision of Jhalawar district last year when the police tried to get the Bajrang Dal activists to pay for their bus tickets. Both these incidents were followed by several *bandhs* and mass mobilization drives in areas with no previous history of communal trouble.

Only a month before the assembly elections, the VHP organised a week-long tribal mela to celebrate the birth anniversary of the legendary Bhil chieftain Rana Punj, who had, as the legend goes, helped Maharana Pratap in his fight against the Mughals. Events like archery and folk per-

formances were a huge draw in the tribal fair.

The VHP has been running *trishul* (trident) distribution programme in Rajasthan's tribal areas and in 13 other districts with substantial minority presence since 1998. Its 'star' campaigner Pravinbhai Togadia covered most of these places, particularly in the wake of spontaneous or accidental communal troubles in Ajmer, Bhilwara, Sawai Madhopur and Mewat and Shekhawati regions. The programme of arming thousands of Hindus with trishuls climaxed in 2003, until Gehlot banned them under the Arms Act and later arrested Togadia in Ajmer. Togadia made it a point to revisit many of these areas immediately prior to the elections.

It is undeniable that Togadia's meetings did not evoke massive response at most places and the role of the RSS and other Hindu organisations in the assembly elections was at best marginal. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the BJP managed to convert the activities of the sangh parivar outfits into votes by concentrating on vulnerable areas. The party's planners never lost sight of the fact that the cumulative effect of even small shifts of Congress voters to the BJP could make a big difference in assembly elections.

The BJP's election planners had organised several professional pre-election surveys in the run up to the assembly elections to gauge the popular mood. The party's election planners concentrated their energies and resources in about 50 seats where the Congress edge was found to be really thin. Though different surveys predicted different seat tallies for the Congress, all concurred that the government employees and unemployed youth were particularly disenchanted

with the ruling party. Consequently special care was taken in subsequent interventions to take advantage of this resentment.

The state BJP leaders, led by Raje's then advisor and party's political secretary, Chandraraj Singhvi, took the lead in contacting employees unions and individual leaders. The employees expected last minute sops from Gehlot just before the elections. But all that Gehlot was able to offer was two instalments of increased dearness allowance, which fell far short of the employees expectations. Their main demand was a conversion of their 64 day strike in 1999-2000 into earned leave and bonus. In contrast, BJP Vice President Lalit Kishore Chaturvedi was quick to hold a press conference virtually conceding all the employees demands soon after dates for the assembly elections were announced.

Vasundhara Raje made it a point to address the concerns of the government employees in all her election meetings. In addition, she held separate meetings with representatives of employees unions. On the day the government employees were being dispatched for poll duty all over the state, they raised pro-BJP and anti-Gehlot slogans, unafraid of making their preferences clear.

Many observers feel that the employees ire against Gehlot worked wonders for the BJP. There were widespread complaints that at many places poll officials openly sided with the opposition party by pressing the 'right' buttons in tandem. Congress supporters later suggested that the job of angry employees was made simpler by the electronic voting machines, though there is no evidence to prove this. It is also alleged that a large number of missing names of minority voters may have had something to do with the government employees resentment against Gehlot.

Fruits of megalomania

SUNIL KUMAR

WHEN elections were announced in five states, barring the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Nationalist Congress Party, few in Chhattisgarh expected the Congress to perform so badly. Election pundits explain that the Congress defeat is not particularly shameful, that it has lost only a small percentage of votes, and that only the loss of seats in the tribal areas was totally unexpected, and so on. But those who have watched Chhattisgarh closely over the past three years would surely mourn for the state's first chief minister, Ajit Jogi, who had worked overtime and shown great vision for

development. In a short span of time he helped make the infant state very different from its dark and bumpy parent state of Madhya Pradesh.

He was among the most erudite of chief ministers and knew the state like the back of his hand. The first chief minister who could communicate with the masses in the local Chhattisgarhi dialect, he was adept at playing to the gallery. He even claimed that the goddess Danteshwari, the most widely worshipped tribal deity, had visited him in his dreams and instructed him to distribute school bags to tribal children – a divine explanation for what became an eyesore for the Election Commission.

So here was a chief minister who got to live in the very same bungalow where 20 years ago he had lived as district collector. He worked tirelessly for 18 hours a day, but felt threatened by V.C. Shukla, the Congress strongman who had dictated to Jogi in his days as collector, but could not, alas, become chief minister of the new state. V.C. Shukla has a history of creating trouble for the Congress whenever he does not like its decisions.

Till the name of Jogi was announced to take oath of office, rumours were rife that Shukla would form the government with a small group of Congress MLAs and BJP support from the outside. So, to be on the safe side, after a year of his rule, Jogi engineered a defection in the BJP ranks and 12 MLAs joined the Congress. It was a most uncalled for move, because no such show of strength was needed on the floor of the legislature; but for greater stability within Congress, it could have been helpful – splitting the Congress became that much more difficult.

Here was a new state with a wounded Congressman and a bleeding BJP. Both had a score to settle with

Jogi. The frustration and ambition of V.C. Shukla gave birth to the Chhattisgarh unit of the Nationalist Congress Party. Though Sharad Pawar has no following in this state, Shukla had enough clout to spoil Jogi's show. All he needed was an electoral symbol to field candidates in all the 90 seats.

Chhattisgarh witnessed its first elections in November-December 2003. The political and electoral parameters were very different from those of an undivided Madhya Pradesh. The situation also stood in contrast in these two adjoining states. While the parent state suffered from serious developmental problems, Chhattisgarh enjoyed the fruits of surplus power, good roads, and its parched villages were blessed with thousands of ponds created each month. Even as Madhya Pradesh was left with disgruntled power consumers, Chhattisgarh managed to walk away with the best power generation plants. The new state suddenly had its due share of everything, an overnight change from a near colonial exploitation at the hands of the more prosperous parts of the erstwhile Madhya Pradesh.

Meanwhile Jogi played the tribal card, the backward caste card, the school bag card and many more. He gradually became so self-obsessed that he lost all sense of proportion. In his entire tenure, not once did he realize that his son was running amok. The Congress, probably even the country, had never seen anyone like Amit Jogi after Sanjay Gandhi of the Emergency infamy. What troubled most Congressmen in the state was the free rein given to Jogi by the party high command, leaving him at liberty to decide party affairs like matters domestic. Every senior Congress leader developed a visceral dislike for him.

Jogi's son apparently had a free hand to abuse his father's ministerial

colleagues and officials. Reportedly, he decided on large government contracts with the help of his notorious friends from Delhi. Perfect power brokers, they had a finger in every pie. Amit Jogi even grabbed the local cable television network with the help of faithful IAS and IPS officers. All over the state, small cable operators were forced to hand over a part of their network or were booked for 'showing' pornographic films and faced harassment.

As if this was not enough, he arm-twisted some not very friendly media persons and bought out some newspapers by offering crores as election advertisements. This was another reason why Jogi never got to know the harsh realities waiting for him on polling day. Not that he would have believed any of them. Some people fail to see the writing on the wall; Jogi failed to see the wall itself. Till the results of the counting became irreversible, he was not aware of the offerings in store for him. Prince Narcissus was in a blissful state, claiming more than two-third majority.

All this served as a made to order propaganda material for the BJP and V.C. Shukla. Once on opposite sides during the Emergency, they now aligned against a common enemy. Both had enough experience of the political outcome of such misdeeds, and were confident of defeating Jogi. Not many, other than V.C. Shukla who kept claiming till the very end that he would form the next government, expected more seats for the NCP, and it got just one. The BJP got what it had expected and Congress what some observers had predicted. The only unexpected outcome was the tribal seats of Bastar going to BJP with a kind of religious fervour.

The plains region of the state, where most of the Jogi-sufferers lived,

was not expected to yield many seats to the Congress. However, probably the economic growth and industrial development in the last three years made them vote for Congress and the Jogi government. The market witnessed a never seen before growth in these three years, a major reason why Jogi got more seats than many had expected.

Tribal Bastar had set a strange record in the previous election, voters giving 11 out of 12 seats to Digvijay Singh's Congress. As part of undivided Madhya Pradesh, Bastar rarely came into sharp focus of media and election analysts. But during the 2003 elections, some well-informed sources told me that the elections held in Bastar five years earlier had not been fair. It was alleged that many booths were non-functional and district officials had gifted those seats to the then Congress Chief Minister Digvijay Singh on a platter, though with some help from conniving polling parties.

Anumber of pundits link the Bastar support to BJP with the caste matters in courts against Jogi who is fighting cases in different courts to prove that he is not an 'untouchable' as alleged by petitioners, but a tribal. This case has political ramifications as Jogi contested the election from a reserved tribal seat. His caste and disputed tribal status can be decided only in a court of law and not through elections. Just as the election verdict in favour of BJP or against the Congress in Chhattisgarh cannot be considered as a verdict for Ram mandir or Moditva, similarly the tribal vote in favour of BJP this time is not a tribal verdict on the caste status of Jogi. In essence, it was a vote *against* Jogi, the person.

Even as Jogi was busy designing a new cabinet, the BJP was busy influencing the tribals with something they cannot resist – the cow. The party

promised one cow to each tribal family, and RSS workers spread the message of this bounty. Push the button on the lotus symbol and get a cow! Not a bad bargain. Most tribals in Chhattisgarh don't drink milk, but they are voracious beefeaters.

Besides, there were no loyal civil servants of Digvijay Singh this time. The Election Commission, after endless fights with Jogi and his mercenaries, changed many district collectors in this small state and deployed paramilitary forces in the Naxal affected Bastar. Naxalites are usually sympathetic to Congress when the only other choice is BJP. In the Bastar region the only seats the Congress got (3/12) this time are from the Naxal stronghold district of Dantewara.

Jogi has no real reason to complain that the Naxals didn't support his party. Though this time the paramilitary CRPF relied on helicopters while travelling with electronic voting machines to and from polling booths, many observers doubt the unprecedented numbers polled in this region, given Naxal blasts and their threat to boycott elections. Incidentally, apart from an attractive cow, the BJP manifesto also promised a monthly allowance of Rs 500 for the educated unemployed. So the youth in below poverty line families had this great offer even outside Bastar.

Let us move away from Bastar. The tribals are scattered all over the state. A large number of non-tribal seats also have tribal voters, and unemployed youth of every section, so the BJP's offer appealed to a large number of voters. Consequently the youth, usually hostile to incumbent governments, had additional reasons to poll against the Congress which had ruled the state for the last ten years. Finally, there was V.C. Shukla, the 'charismatic' old man who could galvanize the

disenchanted youth. He had become a symbol of protest within the Congress party against Jogi and his son, as well as outside the Congress. Just by putting up candidates he made it possible for the BJP to win a dozen and half seats. Intending to be a spoiler from the beginning, he succeeded in his mission. Shukla's only misfortune is his insignificance in the current tally where a clear BJP majority in the assembly did not allow him to become the kingmaker.

The BJP victory was facilitated by several professional inputs from within the party machinery. Its poll campaign was effectively designed as leader after leader poured into the state from Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat and Jharkhand, kept the media happy, and grabbed free headlines on news pages. Jogi, on the other hand, resisted every leader sent by the party to the state as if reluctant to share the credit of what he perceived as his inevitable victory. Of course Sonia Gandhi was allowed to campaign, in addition to Laloo Prasad Yadav, the only leader Jogi had invited.

The state was already bored with having to see Jogi staring down at them from giant hoardings. No wonder, most people stopped responding to his speeches and statements. Since no other Congressman of any stature was allowed any role, they busied themselves in just their home constituencies. There is some truth to the allegations of the Jogi camp that seniors like Shyama Charan Shukla and Motilal Vora did not step out of their sons' constituencies; both however lost and promptly claimed that Jogi had spent millions to ensure that.

Even as Amit Jogi decided the *inter se* worth of different newspapers in rewarding them with party advertisements, Ajit Jogi publicly wondered where the BJP would get any of

its seats. They were like a two-man army running the government and the party alike. It actually needed a self-obsessed Ajit Jogi to inflict defeat on the Congress as well as on the achievements of his own government, a fascinating mix of the good and the bad.

Jogi worked overtime – politicking every minute, designing defections, humiliating people, arm-twisting opponents and their powerful supporters with all the might of a chief minister. Even if there was an easy, straight and comfortable road to travel, he preferred to walk on high voltage electric lines. He launched many welfare schemes, but at the same time made enemies by crushing his opponents ruthlessly, making more people dislike him with every passing day. His son stormed around like a wild bull in Jogi's china shop. Frankly, only Jogi was capable of defeating himself despite a good governmental performance on many fronts. Ultimately it was the Congress that suffered, losing a state that should have been in its pocket.

Many people feel that the decline of the Congress may continue into the coming general elections. It seems unlikely that when in a few months time voters elect the next prime minister, Sonia will be a force in comparison to Atal. And this has little to do with her Italian origins. Those uneasy with a 'foreigner' as PM are already solidly with the BJP. Even others – Congress voters and leaders – find her no match to the leadership qualities of Atal. If the 'secularists' fail to have a leader capable of challenging Atal Bihari Vajpayee one can hardly blame this on communalism.

It is important to look at a couple of other problems that the Congress faced during these elections, cutting across the states that went to polls. The Congress was ruling all the

four large Hindi speaking states. The television news networks had adopted an aggressive style in their election coverage, talking to people in every bulletin. All states face some problems, but a continual telecasting of the Congress governments' shortcomings day and night by innumerable people, projected a picture of an inefficient and corrupt party. It was only Sheila Dikshit who survived this electronic media onslaught with her Janbhagidari programme. No government can do enough to satisfy both the common people and television channels during the elections.

Another problem, at least in the three states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, had to do with the fallout of a Supreme Court decision. For the last year and a half, scheduled castes and tribes have faced problems in getting caste certificates. The Supreme Court had ordered government authorities to look into the records of 50 preceding years before issuing such certificates. A large number of scheduled castes and tribes are very angry about it, especially in border areas experiencing migration from adjoining states. Constituencies adjoining the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra in Chhattisgarh have a huge population of dalit Buddhists, who decided not to vote for the Congress party whose government was denying them certificates in the absence of adequate records.

This was neither noticed before the elections, nor was it reported in any election analysis. Senior BJP leaders have, in their interviews, accepted that they had the services of RSS workers in all border areas from the neighbouring states. These dedicated workers rode bicycles through the interior villages promising cows and unemployment allowance. The Congress was no match for this motivated work

force. And in the next Parliament elections, the situation cannot be much different.

The criminal cases against Jogi and his son became a regular feature of every news bulletin and dominated front pages during the elections. All four Hindi states were to some extent affected by it. So low was Jogi's credibility in the public and media that when the video of Dilip Singh Judeo surfaced, the Joggis became a natural suspect.

The people of Chhattisgarh were already sick of reading criminal charges and allegations against Amit Jogi. While it is shocking that few found fault with a minister taking a bribe, it was even more shocking for people to learn that Amit Jogi had laid the trap and designed the entire conspiracy along with his friends. The countdown for the exit of Congress in Chhattisgarh began rapidly. Jogi started looking like a villain and the opposition allegations against his son got the credibility BJP and NCP were yearning for.

It was clear even a month before the election process began that it was too late for the Congress to change its leader in the state, though there was a CBI chargesheet against Jogi. No other Congress leader was willing to take over from Jogi in the middle of the mess he had created. Despite their complaints, Sonia had handed the state to Jogi on a fixed period lease. It was Sonia's failure that she so insulated herself from her own party leaders who were standing up to her chief ministers.

Jogi had benefited from a strong campaign within the Congress party for a tribal chief minister. The campaign was basically started to checkmate old Brahmin stalwarts like Shyama Charan Shukla, Motilal Vora and V.C. Shukla, not by Jogi but by the

ministers of Digvijay Singh who had always opposed their role in Madhya Pradesh politics. After Jogi became the chief minister, he started another political campaign targeting the same stalwarts – the backward caste movement, led by his former Director General of Police, R.L.S. Yadav.

Though Yadav managed to unite the backward castes in every village, once Jogi failed to get them party tickets in keeping with their new expectations, this very unity worked against the Congress. In many pockets they voted heavily against the party. Since the entire design was originally a Jogi idea, only he is being blamed for the backward caste boomerang. This was Jogi's unique style of functioning – the backward class campaign was not required to fight the BJP, but his own party leaders to humiliate them.

There is now a Congress party in Chhattisgarh with Motilal Vora as its state chief, and a younger leader, Charan Das Mahant from the backward castes as the 'working' president. The leader of the opposition in the state assembly is a tribal leader from Bastar and Jogi rival, Mahendra Karma. This troika have never worked with each other and have nothing in common except their dislike for Jogi. They belong to different regions of Chhattisgarh, as well as to different caste formations. It is a simplistic compromise formula to compensate for the absence of a charismatic leader. It could also be a cautious reaction to the serious setback suffered at the hands of its self-styled former charismatic leader. Possibly, a humiliated Sonia had little choice but to swing to the other extreme, cutting Jogi off all patronage and nominating his critics to party positions in the state.

But these are the internal problems of the Congress party. The new BJP government in Chhattisgarh has

approached governance sensibly. The style of the new Chief Minister, Raman Singh, is that of a person who is warm and humble, yet firm. He is aware that his own performance and that of his ministry is under the tight vigil of his party. He is willing to look ahead rather than be weighed down by the exercise of looking for skeletons in the Jogi cupboard. He has the backing of the BJP led Union government that is working overtime in designing schemes and projects to shower on the state just before elections are announced.

Since Chhattisgarh is some distance from the communal atmosphere of Gujarat, and Ayodhya is not an issue between the two communities or parties, the Raman government is very unlike the Uma Bharati government of Madhya Pradesh. There are no obvious signs of Hindutva, nor are temple replicas visible on the chief minister's table, as in Bhopal. The BJP has a very different image in this state than in Gujarat and UP or even Madhya Pradesh.

People have obviously overlooked the wounds of Gujarat and voted for the BJP in Chhattisgarh. There is no reason why they will not vote for Vajpayee in the forthcoming election. In any case, the present Congress looks like Hindutva's 'B' team, if the recent public display of temple hopping by Digvijay Singh and Ajit Jogi is anything to go by.

The fruits of economic growth, urban development, and liberalization are keeping urban, moneyed and the vocal sections happy. These are the sections that matter to the media. So the newspapers are full of the 'feel good' story. Chhattisgarh has seldom seen bumper crops year after year, so there is also a local feel good factor in addition to the so-called national one.

A tale of three cities

SANJAY KUMAR

THE results of the recently held assembly elections in Delhi should not be compared with other states where elections took place—not only because the electoral verdict in Delhi was different from other states, but because of Delhi's unique status. Even though classified as a state, Delhi still does not enjoy full statehood. It is also a city that attracts vast numbers of people from all over the country. There is large-scale migration from villages to urban centres in all parts of the country, but the migration into Delhi from other states is enormous.

The pace of migration has been extremely fast during the last decade, a period when large numbers, especially the poor, from Bihar and UP moved into Delhi in search of a livelihood. If the period between 1945-47, when large number of people from Pakistan migrated to this city, is seen as the first phase of migration, the decade of the 1990s should be considered as the second phase.

The net result is that this city has a truly cosmopolitan population—people from all parts of the country having settled down here. Also, people of all economic strata—from the very poor to the very affluent. This large-scale migration has changed the social character of the city. It is not the rich but the poor who form the numerical majority in Delhi.

The Jats, Punjabi Khatri and the Brahmins dominated politics in Delhi for many decades. At the time of elections, political parties only talked about the Jat and Punjabi vote, not realising that large-scale migration has changed the social profile of this city. Though these two castes are numerically very large,¹ dalits too constitute a big section of Delhi's population—19%

1. As per the HT-CSDS 2003 survey estimates, Brahmins are 12%, Punjabi Khatri 9% and Jats about 5% of Delhi's population. The HT-CSDS Delhi survey was conducted in all the 70 assembly constituencies of Delhi. In each assembly constituency, 20% polling

according to the 1991 census. Though there are no official figures for people belonging to other castes, our survey estimates that there are also a large numbers of OBC voters in Delhi. The changing social profile has thus impacted on the changing pattern of politics. Our survey suggests that it is no longer caste, but economic status that plays an important role in the voting decision of the people. Though Delhi voters do have caste allegiance, it is class that dominates people's choice. The survey indicates that in the recently concluded elections, the poor Jat and the poor OBC in Delhi voted along similar lines as did the rich among these two communities.

Who constitute the poor in this city? With the help of the HT-CSDS survey, we made six categories of people in Delhi from very poor to the rich, primarily on the basis of assets owned. As per the classification, the very rich in Delhi constitute those who have two or more cars or two or more air-conditioners. The rich in Delhi are those with any two of the following – car, air-conditioner, computer and telephone. At the other extreme are the very poor, those with no material possession. Just above the very poor in the economic ladder are the poor who either live in *jhuggi-jhopri*, or a *kattcha-pucca* mix house, get drinking water from a MCD hand pump or community hand pump or from a MCD tanker and possess either a TV or a cycle or a radio. In between these classes are those classified as middle

booths were randomly selected using the probability proportionate to size (PPS) technique. The total number of sampled localities where the survey was conducted was 1700. In each selected polling booth, two per cent voters were randomly selected from the electoral roll. In total about 38,000 voters, randomly selected from the voters' list, were approached for the interview in September-October, 2003. The total number of completed interviews is 14,460.

class – they either live in a HIG or MIG flat, or have a car or scooter, a colour TV and a refrigerator and at least one telephone. The lower middle class in Delhi constitute those who live in either LIG or Janata flats or *kattcha-pucca* mix houses and have at least two among the following assets – scooter, refrigerator, telephone, colour or black and white TV, radio.

According to the survey, 6% of the people living in Delhi are very poor and another 28% poor. If clubbed together, 34% would be considered as poor. On the other hand, nearly 6% people in Delhi would be considered as very rich and another 12% as rich. As such, 18% people in Delhi are those who would be considered as belonging to the rich class. There is a big middle class, which constitutes 48% of the population. Among the middle class, 28% belong to the upper middle class, while 20% fall in the lower middle class.

There is a clear class difference between the native residents of Delhi and the migrants. Among the natives, a larger number are either rich or belong to the middle class. On the other hand, among the migrants from Bihar and Jharkhand, a large number are poor, and only 7% are rich. Similarly, most migrants from UP and Uttarakhand are also poor. But those who migrated to this city at the time of independence have become very rich – 87% among them have become rich or belong to the middle class.

There is equally a caste dimension to this economic categorisation. The upper castes are relatively rich compared to people of all other castes. The Punjabis in Delhi are the richest, as a high percentage among them are economically very well off and there are only a few who are poor. The Jats and OBCs are not that rich, but many belong to the middle class. The dalits

TABLE 1

Place of origin	Rich	Middle	Poor
Delhi	20	53	27
Bihar and Jharkhand	7	31	61
UP and Uttarakhand	10	46	45
Pakistan	36	51	13
Other states	23	49	28

TABLE 2

Castes	Rich	Middle	Poor
Brahmin	20	55	25
Punjabi Khatri	44	46	10
Banias & Jains	32	51	17
Other upper castes	21	53	24
Jats	14	61	26
OBCs	8	43	52
Dalits	4	44	52
Muslims	5	43	52
Sikhs	30	53	17

TABLE 3

Opinion on Privatisation of DTC			
	All	Rich	Middle Poor
DTC should be privatised	19	30	20 13
DTC should be a government undertaking	64	55	66 67

Note: no difference 5%; no opinion 12%.

TABLE 4

Opinion on Privatisation of Electricity			
	All	Rich	Middle Poor
Privatisation of electricity has benefited people	31	45	31 22
Privatisation of electricity has increased problems for people	54	40	55 59

Note: no difference 9%; no opinion 6%.

TABLE 5

Opinion on Government Schools			
	All	Rich	Middle Poor
Teaching in government schools can improve by increasing fee	14	18	15 11
Teaching in government schools can improve without increasing fee	74	71	74 76

Note: no difference 6%, no opinion 6%.

are the poorest in Delhi. While 52% are poor, only 4% dalits are rich. The Muslims in Delhi too are not economically well off with a majority falling among the poor. Of the Sikhs, nearly 30% are rich and only 17% poor.

Besides the differing social profile of the rich and the poor of this city, their thinking pattern is also different. Currently, there is a trend towards privatisation of various services in this city – from transport to education and health. The survey reveals that while there is some support for privatisation among the rich and the middle class, the poor in Delhi are opposed to it. Though not everyone in the city is hostile to privatisation, clearly opposition to it outstrips those in favour. One can clearly see differences of opinion among people of different economic classes – the rich in favour and the poor displaying greater resistance. The opinions of the middle class lie in between.

There is a vast gulf in the thinking of the people belonging to the two economically opposed social communities, the rich and the poor. The rich have a different mindset from that of an average Dilliwalla. While a majority of poor are in favour of caste-based reservation in government jobs, a majority of the rich are against such a policy. The rich in this city see beggars as a nuisance and would like the police to deal with them more strictly.

TABLE 6

Opinion on Government Hospitals				
	All	Rich	Middle	Poor
Public will pay more for good treatment in government hospitals	30	40	32	21
Treatment should be free in government hospitals	61	51	60	69

Note: no difference 4%; no opinion 5%.

The poor, however, have great sympathy for them. Little wonder that the wealthy want the jhuggis removed, but there are very few among the poor who would support such a move. Further, the rich favour a ban on outsiders settling in Delhi. This feeling is shared by a large number of people, but much more among the rich. This urban rich mindset is such that large numbers among them believe the illiterates should not have the right to vote, but the poor clearly disagree.

Despite these differences of opinions there is unanimity about democracy being the best form of government. Both the rich and the poor have firm faith in democracy – 81% of the rich and 69% of the poor share this opinion. But, is there a difference in the voting pattern between the two? The findings of the HT-CSDS Delhi survey help us in providing a tentative answer to this question.

A quick look at the results of the recently held assembly elections in Delhi show that the Congress party won 47 assembly seats, polling 48% of the votes. On the other hand, the BJP won only 20 seats and polled 35% votes. Only two smaller political parties – the JD(S) and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) – won a seat each, with all other political parties shut out. An independent candidate won a single seat. Though the Bahujan Samaj

Party (BSP) failed to open its account, it polled 5.8% votes. Compared to the 1998 assembly elections, there was little difference in the performance of the two major political parties. The votes polled by the Congress and BJP indicates that the support for the Congress

was much higher compared to the BJP. But does this mean that a majority of the people from all social communities voted for the Congress while the BJP was deserted by all sections of society?

If we look at the voting pattern of people belonging to different economic classes, we notice that despite the defeat, large numbers of the rich and very rich voted for the BJP, but among the poor and the very poor voters a large number voted Congress. Among the very rich and rich voters, 44 and 41% voted BJP, while among the poor and the very poor only 24 and 18% voted for the party. Among the poor and very poor voters, 53 and 54% voted Congress, indicating a clear differentiation in the voting pattern of people belonging to different economic classes.

This does not mean that caste had no role to play in the politics of the city. Rather, when it comes to voting for a political party, it is class that cuts across caste.

The voting pattern of Brahmins shows that a majority supported the

TABLE 7

Those who agree –	The Middle Class Mindset of People Living in Delhi			
	All	Rich	Middle	Poor
Illiterate should not have the right to vote	23	36	24	14
Caste based reservations in jobs should be stopped	55	74	59	41
Jhuggis should be completely eliminated from Delhi	57	73	63	39
Temple should be constructed at the disputed site at Ayodhya	59	58	62	54
Outsiders should be stopped from settling down in Delhi	59	64	63	51
No one should have the right to go on strike	42	51	52	35
Police should deal more strictly with beggars	67	76	70	57
Democracy is the best form of government	75	81	77	69

Congress as compared to the BJP. One notices a similar voting pattern of people belonging to other upper castes. Can we then conclude that the upper castes voted for the Congress in large numbers in the recent assembly elections in Delhi? This may be true, but if we examine the voting pattern of people belonging to a different economic class among the Brahmins, the poor

among them voted Congress while the rich voted BJP. Even among the Punjabi Khatri, while the poor voted for the Congress the rich favoured the BJP. It is only among the Jains and the Banias that, irrespective of their economic class, all voted for the BJP in large numbers.

TABLE 8

The Rich and the Very Rich Voted for the BJP While the Poor Voted for the Congress

Economic class	Congress	BJP
Very rich	37	44
Rich	38	41
Middle class	45	36
Lower middle class	51	27
Poor	53	24
Very poor	54	18

TABLE 9

INC - BJP

How Upper Castes Voted in the Delhi Assembly Elections

Brahmins	Rich	34	49
	Middle	44	40
	Poor	45	37
Punjabi Khatri	Rich	34	45
	Middle	39	42
	Poor	41	40
Banias & Jains	Rich	32	49
	Middle	36	47
	Poor	32	44
Other upper castes	Rich	40	42
	Middle	41	37
	Poor	47	33

How Jats and OBCs Voted in the Delhi Assembly Elections 2003

Jats	Rich	32	50
	Middle	41	43
	Poor	47	28
OBCs	Rich	39	34
	Middle	46	33
	Poor	51	25

Dalits, Muslims and Sikhs

Dalits	Rich	62	16
	Middle	56	18
	Poor	56	14
Sikhs	Rich	33	43
	Middle	44	35
	Poor	51	21

Though the Jats were divided in the recent assembly elections, there was a tilt in favour of the Congress. But this was not true of all Jats. While the rich Jats voted for the BJP in large numbers, the poor voted for the Congress. Among the rich Jats, 50% voted for the BJP, and only 32% for Congress. On the contrary, among the poor Jats, 47% voted for the Congress and only 28% for the BJP. A similar voting pattern is observed among the Sikhs, the rich voting for the BJP and the poor for the Congress.

It is only among the OBCs and dalits, irrespective of class, that large numbers voted Congress and only a few for the BJP. The Muslims too stood solidly behind the Congress.

It will be incorrect to make broad generalisations about Delhi and the people living in this city. It is, however, clear that Delhi is not one city, but basically represents three cities merged into one. Gone are the days when people used to think of two Delhi's – New Delhi and Old Delhi. Lately, this differentiation changed from New Delhi/Old Delhi to *Yamuna Paar* and the rest. It is time we see Delhi as three different cities – a city of the rich, the poor and of a large middle class – all merged into one. The three cities though not separated from one another by geographical boundaries, clearly display social and cultural boundaries. The question to ponder over is: with increasing migration and a growing population, will the three different identities of the city remain or are they likely to merge in the years to come?

The rhetoric of development

JAVEED ALAM

THE country is being pushed into another election, all because the BJP and some of its allies have been overwhelmed by the 'feel good' factor. The recent election victories in the three Hindi states and the unexpected spurt in the economy after a sluggish previous year – good monsoons and the consequent industrial recovery – have created an unprecedented euphoria. With an infantile enthusiasm, we are already talking of becoming the third largest economy in the world by 2020, all on the basis of 8% growth in the third quarter of the current year.

For an entirely different reason a similar mood overtook Chandrababu Naidu. He emerged miraculously,

almost unscratched, out of a deadly attack launched by the Naxalites on his motorcade on 1 October 2003, as he was en route to Tirupati to offer prayers to Lord Venkateswara. A hype was created that the Lord personally intervened to save his life for his service to the people and wants him to do the same for many years to come. After recovery from the shock and disbelief, 'hurrah' was the atmosphere in the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the general consensus being that it would be a good bet to advance the election to February 2004 to cash in on the sympathy wave sweeping across the state. After some discussion and a deliberate creation of suspense, the

11th assembly of Andhra Pradesh was dissolved almost a year in advance. And elections were recommended for February 2004.

It is difficult to believe that there is in reality any such sympathy wave. What seems more likely is a superstitious belief doing the round, and which was deliberately encouraged, that Lord Venkateswara intervened to save Chandrababu Naidu. This was directly encouraged by Babu himself and loudly sung by his cohorts, day in and day out. His daily song – a hand in the sling and a scarred, haggard look – was that he is not scared of death and that since the Lord wants him to serve the people he is prepared to face death any time. The Lord saved him from Naxalites and the Naxalites are a menace. Further that every other political party – the Congress, the CPI(M), the CPI and the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), a newly formed outfit fighting for a separate Telangana state – are in league with the Naxalites to bring him down. This has become a pre-campaign political cliché.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, this made everybody nervous since nobody was above reproach and everybody was suspect. The hype did work for some time but soon the campaign came unstuck. The (anti) incumbency factor slowly came to the fore and the ruling establishment started showing signs of nervousness. Slowly an upbeat mood was discernible in the opposition camp.

At this time an unexpected development took place – three Congress governments were defeated. The BJP claimed it to be a verdict between non-performance and good governance. Chandrababu Naidu, the good CEO, picked up the cue and changed his tack. ‘Development’ and good governance (whatever it is supposed to mean; politics plus administration?)

is now the new theme of his election campaign.

What does this imply? That Andhra Pradesh has done well in the sphere of development, providing a clean administration to the people. In other words, he has brought down the campaign from emotive issues to worldly concerns, and these can be objectively contested. This is how the campaign in AP is now shaping up. Before looking at this more closely, a few issues need to be kept in mind. The first is to separate the more enduring factors from those of a shifting nature and assess if there is any change in the factors of a lasting kind.

An unusual feature of Andhra politics, as compared to states in northern India, is the political command of the dominant castes over the electoral process. The two dominant castes in Andhra Pradesh – the Reddys and Kammas – make up on a rough estimate, 6.5 and 5% of the state’s population. Starting with control over land and related assets, these communities have over time moved into business – trade, transport and shops – and the growing industry. They now enjoy an undoubted economic clout in the modern economy, apart from their continuing hold over land and, therefore, the more traditional village institutions.

The OBCs comprise around 45% of the population, the scheduled castes 15.5% and the tribes, though not numerous, about 6%, are concentrated in three contiguous areas. It is intriguing that given the churning among the oppressed in India, Andhra politics still remains under the control of about 12% of the dominant castes. It is not that there is no churning among these communities, as in northern India. Important social and economic changes have taken place and a numerous middle class has emerged with articulate spokesmen. The difference is that

there is no single large backward caste in Andhra, like the Yadavs in UP and Bihar or the Kunbis in Maharashtra. There are many OBCs, none numerically large and thus unable to evolve an enduring *political alliance*.

The result is that the oppressed communities of OBCs and dalits align in complex ways with one or the other dominant caste. The Kammas are concentrated in the coastal districts whereas the Reddys are numerous in Telangana, rather sizeable in Rayalaseema and with a visible presence in the coastal districts. (These are the three regions of AP). The Kammas are absent in Telangana except as émigrés in and around Hyderabad, have colonised some fertile land in a few districts and are visibly present in some districts of Rayalaseema.

Let us look at the complexity of electoral alignments. The OBCs in the coastal areas tend to go along with the Congress Party but in the Telangana region they have shown a strong inclination to go with TDP. This choice is simple to understand. They try to distance themselves from the dominant caste of the specific region. Therefore, in the Rayalaseema region, there is a greater division of the OBC vote between the two main political parties. If we break up the OBC vote at the state level, it tends to even out between the two parties. It is important to remember that the BJP is making a dent in the votes of all the oppressed castes, in all regions, including Hyderabad city.

In the capital city the above pattern does not hold. Politics here is centred around what looks like the unbreakable hold of the Majlis-e-Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM) over the Muslims, who make up around a third of the population. In the south of the city, often referred to as the ‘old city’, where Muslims constitute 70% of the

population, all the seats in the dissolved assembly were held by the MIM. The decline of poverty among the Muslims, as witnessed in the near disappearance of the *rickshaw* as a mode of transport, the emergence of a sizeable class of prosperous entrepreneurs and successful businessmen, a large middle class among other factors has failed to dent the hold of the MIM over the Muslims. In fact, if anything, it has strengthened its hold.

The MIM story represents a complicated intersection of social and political factors and cannot be told in this brief essay. Suffice it to note that the Muslims in Hyderabad see the MIM as the anchor round which to defend themselves against the increasing 'menace' of Hindutva, especially its aggressive arm, the VHP. The remaining vote is equally divided between the Congress and TDP, with the TDP enjoying an edge as seen in the municipal elections held a year back. Nevertheless, Hyderabad as a city is unrepresentative of much that is Andhra Pradesh. Even its growing prosperity and, in comparison to most cities in India, healthy urban growth may be a deceptive sign of what is happening in the rest of the state.

This brings us to the 'development' narrative, together with good governance, which Chandrababu Naidu wants to make into his main election plank. The story of post-reform AP is somewhat different from what is being retailed by the ruling establishment. It is a complicated mix with too many negative signals. Let us look at it a little closely though space does not permit reporting in detail.

Andhra was a late reformer, beginning 1994 unlike the rest of the country which initiated the process in 1991. But since then it has followed a furious pace and is now in the forefront of reforms. Recent studies, espe-

cially those by the Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), entitled *Andhra Pradesh Development: Economic Reforms and Challenges Ahead*, do not indicate a story of any great success. If we take the GSDP (gross state domestic product), two things stand out. The rate of growth at 5.31% between 1993-94 and 2000-01 is below the national average of 6.31%. But what comes as a surprise is that compared to the pre-reform period in the state itself, that is between 1980-81 to 1990-91, the rate of growth of GSDP declined from 5.50 to 5.31. As a result, Andhra which stood at the fourth position in the country in 1980 has slipped to eighth currently.

The TDP has been harping that the period prior to reforms was one of sluggish growth, citing the change in per capita GSDP growth from 3.33 in the pre-reform period to 4.04 in the post-reform period. Though true, the growth rate is still below the national average of 4.38. Clearly Andhra's record in the post-reform period is nothing to crow about, as is being done by Naidu. Nevertheless, a decline in the rate of growth of GSDP, but an increase in its per capita rate calls for some explanation.

The Census figures for 1991 and 2001 show a noticeable decline in population growth and this decline is reflected in a better per capita GSDP. The CESS study attributes the population decline to better management of family planning and welfare oriented programmes; also the women's self-help groups acted as a positive influence. It is worth noting that DWCRA groups number 4.70 lakh with a total membership of 65 lakh in the state (reportedly half the total number in the country) and these groups are successfully running a number of schemes. The growth rates of literacy in AP have risen and the gap between the

all-India and AP literacy rate has narrowed. Women's literacy has improved as well. All this together has contributed to a decline in population growth resulting in better figures for the per capita GSDP.

More depressing, however, despite impressive performance in IT (and IT enabled services) and biotechnology, is the poor performance of modern manufacturing. If the GSDP is calculated only in relation to rate of growth in industry, the rate declines from 7.36% in the 1980s to 6.20% in the 1990s. The question therefore is: with sluggish industrial growth, how far can the growth in services be sustained? Equally important is that employment has not grown. It grew at an annual rate of 0.31% in the 1990s as compared to 2.30 in the 1980s. Results from the same study show that while worker productivity increased, wages declined during the 1990s. Andhra Pradesh therefore is in the forefront of the states in India experiencing an *intensification of exploitation*.

Why then is AP not the leading state in attracting private investment? According to a study conducted by the CII, Andhra is way down at 8th position in attracting investments. The leading states are Maharashtra, Delhi, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Gujarat and others. As against Maharashtra which attracted 17.32% of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Andhra's share between 1991 and 2002 was a mere 4.65%, much of it in IT and IT enabled services. There is no clear answer but inadequate credit and defective infrastructure has often been cited as primary reasons, although reforms and investment have been undertaken in these spheres. The rate of gross fixed capital formation too has declined, falling from 6% in the 1980s to 3.6% in the 1990s. Since it is often argued that this may be due to bottlenecks in

the reforms process, there is hope for the future given the vigorous push to reforms now.

Overall, despite some strides, AP ranks the lowest among the southern states, especially when seen in relation to the quality of life. Infant mortality has declined, life expectancy has improved, literacy is rising fast, population growth is markedly declining, women are being empowered faster than in many areas of India, but on most of these counts it remains well below other southern states. Fortunately, sub-regional disparities have markedly come down though the sentiment for Telangana remains strong.

Most worrying on the health front is the deterioration in medical care in the state with private medical practice taking over from public medical facilities. In all the cities, the private sector with its corporate hospitals is directly leading to the decline of government hospitals. The public expenditure on health services has fallen from 1.29% (itself a low figure to start with) to 1.08 between the 1980s and 1990s. How all this will affect the health indices in the long run is, at the moment, difficult to predict.

Given the conflicting nature of the developmental process and the people's experience, it is difficult to predict how the campaign and electoral results will be affected. Election fever is in the air, but the campaign has yet to start. The nature of alliances or the pattern of adjustments of seats, though getting clearer with each passing day, remains undecided. What is clear is that the earlier alliance between the TDP and the BJP is viewed less as seat adjustment than a long-term strategic understanding. This is bound to impact the minority vote which was moving towards the TDP in the 1990s. According to the CSDS data, about 36% of the Muslims voted

for TDP as against 57% for Congress in 1996. It is likely that there will be a clear shift of Muslims away from the TDP. All through the 1990s, the Muslim population in all elections ignored the TDP's seat adjustment with the BJP due to local compulsions. This is now less likely since, especially after Gujarat, Muslims are incensed.

A larger proportion of women voting for TDP may to an extent compensate for this loss. But since women have always voted for TDP in somewhat larger numbers than for the Congress, the gain may well be marginal. Women self-help groups have made rapid strides in Andhra. DWCRA, despite the corruption which prevails everywhere, has been a great success. Women in the rural areas have shown a great deal of confidence in taking bold initiatives and using the corpus of Rs 1600 crore (built through each member contributing one rupee a day) through Mandal Mahila Samakhya, mahila banks and supermarkets to boost productive activity among women throughout the state. The state has also done well, in comparison to many others, in participatory management of land, water and forest resources, joint forest management groups and water user's associations. Watershed development committees are, for all their shortcomings, a palpable presence. All this has created different degrees of goodwill as well as disaffection because of exclusions and corruption.

Everybody accuses Chandrababu Naidu of large-scale corruption, which may well be true. But Babu has creatively used corruption to institute a new kind of patron-client relationship to replace the old one based on caste and kinship. This is of a contemporary nature, building a kind of vote machine, *a la* American electoral machines. Using schemes like Food for Work

(Rs 3600 crore and 36 lakh tons of rice distributed over the last three years of drought), Deepam Scheme (for LPG connections to both urban and rural poor), Annapurna Scheme (10 kg free rice to the poorest) Naidu has placed money and materials in the hands of his supporters, who in turn have become party activists. Not surprisingly, there is massive corruption in some of these schemes. A study of 'food for work' by the Department of International Development (UK) found that even where it was working well there was a slippage of at least 47% of funds and food into the hands of those running the programme. The leakage was higher where it was not working well, and at a few places the slippage of funds was as high as 99%.

There are many other schemes – Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Chanduvulu Panduga (literacy festival), Neeru Meenu (water conservation), Velugu Project (poverty elimination). Many of these are meant to compensate for the collateral damage of globalization. But the story everywhere is the same, like with the food for work. These create viable patron client networks and substitute for the lack of party organisation and, therefore, are a political asset. How these will work to neutralise discontent is difficult to say at the moment.

Though the discontent is quite widespread, the Congress has nothing positive to offer. It has a good leader in Rajshekhar Reddy who is accessible, perceived as honest and enjoys some mass appeal. A good sign for the Congress is that all other parties are agreed on not splitting the anti-NDA vote, with the Communist parties taking the lead in this direction. It is only when the campaign gets under way that we will be able to see how the underlying currents get connected. Till then one can only wait.

Choices before the BSP

SUDHA PAI

THE assembly elections held in December 2003 in four states in north India – Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Delhi – were widely perceived as the ‘semi-final’ round to the Lok Sabha elections due in 2004. The importance of the BSP in these elections lay in the presence of a large community of dalits in all the four states, and the ability of the party to function as a ‘third force’ standing between the two principal contenders grabbing votes from both of them.

The BSP is more than merely a state level party. A product of dalit assertion in the northern plains, within a little more than a decade of its formation it has attained recognition as a national party – a status that important state level parties such as the Samajwadi Party have yet to acquire. In all the four states where elections were held, both the Congress and the BJP locked in a bipolar situation have been competing throughout the 1990s for the support of the dalits in order to obtain a majority. The two national parties hope to control the states in order to capture power at the Centre; the BSP

on the other hand hopes, in a period when no party can gain a majority and alliances hold the key, to emerge as a major player on the national scene.

An examination of the election results in the four states reveals that the BSP despite the difficulties it has faced throughout 2003 – the Taj Corridor controversy, collapse of its government in UP, the illness of Kanshi Ram, and a major split in the party in UP followed by one in Madhya Pradesh prior to the elections – has improved its vote share in all the four states. However, the party has not been able to translate this gain into seats. This is most evident in Madhya Pradesh where the BSP obtained 7.6% of the vote share as against 6.3% in the 1998 state elections. It could wrest only two seats each in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as against 11 in the previous election in the undivided state.

1. All the election results mentioned in the paper are from the Statistical Report of the Election Commission of India for the state assembly elections held in the four states in 1996 and 1998.

In Rajasthan the party got two seats in the previous and present election, but its vote share rose from 2.17 to 3.97%. In Delhi in neither elections could the party manage a single seat though its vote share rose from 3.09 to 5.7%.¹ The BSP's poor performance in terms of seats is of particular significance as its ambition of emerging as a key player in politics, both in the states – particularly in Madhya Pradesh where it hoped to replicate the UP model – and in the national arena has been belied.

The problems faced by the BSP during the past year have undoubtedly contributed to its poor performance. However, this paper argues that despite the seminal importance that dalit identity has come to occupy in state and national politics, the increasing polarization between the two national contenders – the BJP and the Congress – within a fragmented and 'regionalized multiparty system',² has reduced the space that smaller parties such as the BSP with a sectarian base can occupy. Every state assembly election during the past decade, including the December 2003 elections, has been fought like a national election. Further, since the early 1990s, politics is no longer played at the national level, and the states constitute the battleground in which national parties in alliance with ambitious state players attempt to build parliamentary majorities.

The approaching Lok Sabha elections have introduced an element of urgency and intensity in the contest between the two national parties. Both the Congress and the BJP are trying to capture power in as many states as possible in order to use them as the base from which they can form a coalition at the Centre. Against this larger political canvas, the paper attempts to

understand the importance of the electoral verdict for the future of the BSP, which represents powerful nascent social forces and hopes to play a role at the national level.

The December elections were crucial for the ambition the BSP harbours of emerging as a national player on many counts. They were the first elections held since Mayawati became the national president of the party after Kanshi Ram, its founder who is held in great esteem by the dalits in north India, fell ill. Since the mid-1990s the party has faced a dilemma: while identity assertion by the dalits has increased at the grassroots in north India, this has not been appropriately reflected – with the exception of UP – in electoral outcomes. This is most glaringly evident in Punjab and Haryana where growing antagonism between the Jats and dalits, as seen in the Talhan controversy in the former and increasing atrocities against dalits in the latter, but the party in electoral terms not helped to progress. In Rajasthan, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh its base has been growing, but at a slow pace.

Consequently, during 2003 the party organised a number of *swabhiman* (self-respect) rallies to arouse awareness and increase the party's base, aggressively criticize opposition parties and demonstrate its exclusive claim to the 'dalit constituency'. While the largest rally was held on the occasion of Mayawati's birthday on 15 January 2003 in Lucknow, similar ones were organized during the summer in Chandigarh and other parts of Punjab and Haryana. The party also tried to gain support among dalits at Talhan by supporting the Dalit Action Committee against the Jat Sikhs on the gurudwara issue. Earlier in December 2002, at a *savdhaan* (caution) rally at Amethi on the issue of rebuilding the house of a dalit razed by local Thakurs,

Mayawati denounced Sonia Gandhi's attempts to meddle and 'create caste tensions' and called upon dalits to defeat the Congress in the next Lok Sabha elections (*Frontline*, 14 February 2003:43).

Pprior to the assembly elections in the four states the BSP faced two major problems which impinged upon its poll strategy: the collapse of its coalition with the BJP in UP, followed by a major split in the party. The BSP-BJP coalition formed after the February 2002 assembly elections was from the start built upon distrust and cynicism. As in earlier coalitions, Mayawati adopted an imperious style of functioning reducing the BJP to a junior partner, revived many exclusively dalit-oriented programmes, and spent considerable state resources on 'cultural policies' and memorials for Dr Ambedkar in Lucknow (Pai 2003). These were meant to improve its support base among the dalits and the backwards.

All this demoralized and alarmed the BJP, which in successive elections had already seen a systematic erosion of its support base. On the other hand BSP seemed to be gaining substantially from carefully nurtured Muslim and dalit constituencies. Consequently, for 15 months the coalition moved from one crisis to another until the Taj Corridor controversy eventually led to its collapse in August 2003. The investigation into Mayawati's assets which followed, and the possibility of her arrest, demoralized party cadres.

More serious was the split in the party which was much bigger than previous ones. According to initial reports, 37 defectors from the BSP joined the SP immediately and more were expected to join as the SP's tally of 181 was still short of a simple majority by 21. On 9 September when the

SP proved its majority on the floor of the assembly, of the total 398 votes polled through the raising of hands, 244 were in favour of the motion. The strength of the SP coalition, which in September consisted of 181 SP, 16 Congress, 14 Rashtriya Lok Dal and four Rashtriya Kranti Party MLAs besides 26 others, rose to 241 as against 160 of the BSP, BJP and the Hindu Mahasabha ('Mulayam wins trust vote', *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 9 September 2003). Some commentators have argued that the split was mainly in the Thakur and Muslim sections of the party who were lured to the SP and the BSP's main dalit base remains secure ('UP: more of the same', editorial, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2003: 3744). Nevertheless, it considerably weakened the party and undermined its position vis-à-vis its rivals prior to the assembly elections in four states in December.

The collapse of the Mayawati government led to significant political realignments in UP. The BJP and the SP, keen rivals in UP for a decade, now decided to keep the Congress from forming a government with the BSP, apprehensive that this might lead to an alliance between the Congress and the BSP in the December elections. This in turn forced the Congress to support the SP coalition even though it decided not to join the government. These developments marginalized the BSP and reduced the possibility of an alliance with the Congress in the December elections.

Among the proximate factors that impinged upon the performance of the BSP in the elections, the most important was the issue of pre-poll alliances. As the party has a major dalit base in Madhya Pradesh, considerations here determined strategy for all the regions. The essential bipolarity of politics in

Madhya Pradesh left the party unclear as to which of the majors to join hands with. It also felt that by going alone in the state it could improve its vote and seat share, at least in the northern districts and, based on it, to replicate the UP model with the help of the BJP if no party gained a decisive victory. This strategy, however, had to be revised after the fall of the coalition government in UP.

Nor could the BSP make up its mind on whether to form an alliance with the Congress. In the early 1990s, the Congress had been keen to keep the BSP out of Madhya Pradesh as it believed that it could mobilize the dalits and thereby absorb its base. The Congress victory in 1998 and the poor performance of the BSP in the 1999 Lok Sabha election when it was squeezed between the two national parties, led the former to continue with this line of thinking. But in 2003 the need to meet the challenge posed by the BJP finally impelled the Congress to revise its strategy.

The collapse of the BSP-BJP coalition in UP also led Mayawati to declare in October, 'We will do anything to defeat the BJP' ('A chief minister's battle', *Frontline*, 5 December 2003: 22). Accordingly, in early November the Congress declared an initial list of only 220 candidates leaving the field open for the BSP in the Gwalior-Chambal region, a stronghold of the party. Mayawati, however, decided that the BSP would fight the election alone, though not contest those seats where it was weak, in order to prevent the BJP from winning. During the campaign she further declared that the major aim of the party was to win sufficient seats to prevent any government from being formed in the state without the BSP (*Dainik Bhaskar* [Hindi], Bhopal, 5 November 2003).

In sum, while the BSP was not willing to make a formal alliance, the Congress leadership was so confident of victory in Madhya Pradesh that it did not think a formal alliance was required. In the event, the BSP ultimately pursued a strategy of improving its position vis-à-vis both the national parties, keeping an eye on the coming Lok Sabha elections.

In keeping with this strategy the BSP decided to contest 170 seats in Madhya Pradesh, 125 in Rajasthan, 55 in Chhattisgarh and 40 in Delhi ('Congress gives room, BSP opens the door', K. Neelima, *Indian Express*, 1 November 2003). Accordingly, in the Gwalior-Chambal and Rewa-Satna regions, voters were told 'by word of mouth' to support the Congress in constituencies where the BSP did not put up a candidate. In these regions the BSP had done well in the previous elections and it was felt that with the help of the Congress it could do better. The Congress hoped that in return it would benefit in the Mahakoshal and the Bundelkhand regions (Rajnish Sharma, 'BSP asks its supporters to vote for Congress', *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 29 November 2003).

However, the tacit understanding between the BSP and the Congress in Madhya Pradesh led to a split in the state unit of the party. Unlike in UP where the issue of alliances has been divisive, the Madhya Pradesh unit of the BSP has always opposed any alliance with the two national parties. Its leaders argue that the BSP must grow as a dalit-based party through sustained grassroots mobilization rather than opportunistic alliances to gain votes (*Dainik Bhaskar* [Hindi], Bhopal, 30 October 2003). Dalit leaders within the BSP in Madhya Pradesh showed their displeasure with Mayawati's policy. State BSP chief Phool Singh Baraiya left along with Sant

Singh, another leader, in end October to form the Samata Samaj party. (*Frontline*, 21 November 2003: 33). Mayawati accused Baraiya of a clandestine electoral agreement with the BJP, which he has denied. Although he lost his seat, the exit of Phool Singh, an experienced and respected leader who had worked with Kanshi Ram, damaged the party's prospects in the Gwalior region.

Another significant development responsible for the poor performance of the BSP in its stronghold of the Vindhya and Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh was the breakdown of the Dalit-backward alliance within the party in southern UP (Bundelkhand) and northern Madhya Pradesh (Baghelkhand) in which the Kurmi and Kacchi OBC groups had played a central role. In 1996, Sonelal Patel broke away from the party in east UP to form his own party, the Kurmi-dominated Apna Dal.³ The party performed well in small pockets in the 1998 election in Madhya Pradesh and is gaining ground.

In the 1998 state elections the Kacchi's under the leadership of BSP MP Sukhlal Kushwaha broke away to form the Samanata Dal ('BSP loses steam in the Vindhyas', *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 24 November 2003). Both parties are now consolidating their base by attracting their own caste men and have cut into the vote of the BSP, each gaining a little more than 1% of the total vote. Moreover, the BSP's strategy of giving tickets to upper castes in order to widen its base and gain more seats was disliked by the dalits in Madhya Pradesh. 'If a Thakur will fight as its candidate, what's the use of voting for the BSP?' argued Ramkishore Saket, a chamar in Mangawan constituency (*ibid.*).

3. See SG, 1999.

Nordid giving tickets to Thakurs help, as they did not like Mayawati's treatment of Raja Bhaiyya in east UP.

An analysis of the results shows that the dalit vote was divided between the BSP, BJP and the Congress due to which the BSP failed to win seats. It performed poorly in its traditional areas where the BJP gained substantially: in the Chambal region the BJP won six seats and in the Vindhya region 11 seats. In contrast, the BSP won one seat in the Chambal region, but lost five seats and 5.1% of the vote share compared to 1998. In the Vindhya region it won one seat and lost one though it increased its vote share over 1998. In Mahakoshal, tribal Malwa and North Malwa it gained no seats over 1998 but increased its vote share, which enabled it to improve its overall vote tally by 0.9% ('Behind an electoral wave in Madhya Pradesh', *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 10 December 2003). The Congress was damaged by both the BJP and the BSP, the latter improving its vote share over 1998. The Congress gained only a slender lead over the BJP in dalit votes: it got 31%, the BJP got 28%, the BSP standing last with 19%. The SP also performed well winning seven seats and cutting into the share of the Congress and the BSP (*ibid.*).

The most important factor, however, proved to be the strong anti-incumbency wave against the ruling party in Madhya Pradesh. The 'BSP' (*bijli, sadak, pani*) factor proved so important that a large number of the traditional supporters of the Congress and BSP shifted to the BJP. The BJP performed well among all classes in all regions of Madhya Pradesh, including Congress and BSP strongholds. Of the 171 seats that the BJP won, only in 36 does the BSP vote exceed the BJP's margin. Had the Congress even won all these 36 seats in the absence

of a BSP candidate, the BJP would still have secured a comfortable majority (*ibid.*). In such a situation a Congress-BSP alliance would not have helped either of them.

In the remaining three states the situation was somewhat different. A seat-by-seat analysis of voting percentages in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan shows that the lack of an alliance between the BSP and the Congress worked to the advantage of the BJP. In Chhattisgarh a Congress-BSP tie-up would have given them six constituencies; while a Congress-BSP-left alliance would have yielded 44 seats ('Ekla chalo re' does Congress in', *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 6 December 2003). In Rajasthan a Congress-BSP alliance together with an understanding with the NCP and the left, would have deducted 29 seats from the BJP tally.

In Delhi, where the BSP vote share has been rising steadily, the lack of an alliance led to a division of dalit votes between the Congress and the BSP, giving the BJP an advantage on 17 seats that it won. If the BSP had not put up any candidate, the Congress could have won many more seats decimating the BJP in the capital ('Gunning for BJP, BSP ends up hitting Congress', Sreelatha Menon, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, 6 December 2003). While it is true that in these three states the Congress as the larger party would have benefited more than the BSP, a Congress-BSP coalition government was a possibility, which would have given both parties an advantageous position in the approaching Lok Sabha elections.

The poor performance of the BSP in the December elections soon after the collapse of its government in UP followed by a major split, has undermined its position in state and national politics. Buoyed by its recent electoral success, the BJP in UP, is

attempting fresh alignments to strengthen its base prior to the Lok Sabha elections: bringing Kalyan Singh back into the party to strengthen its OBC vote-bank and moving closer to the SP. After the assembly elections there are already reports of a rift in the Congress-SP alliance in UP with the latter feeling that it does not require the support of the former. In the immediate post-electoral scene the BSP is no longer perceived as a valuable ally.

At the national level the SP, after forming the government in UP and performing well in Madhya Pradesh, is projecting itself as a national party and is trying to marginalize the BSP. For instance, in the winter session of Parliament it refused to include the BSP in the opposition on the grounds that it had campaigned for the BJP in Gujarat. It has also argued for keeping the BSP out of the 'secular' front floated by the Congress prior to the Lok Sabha elections. Following the elections, the SP is not keen to join the NDA either. Currently all alignments are open with each party making a fresh bid for alliances. In such a situation, the immediate task before the BSP is to rebuild the party in UP and the northern states and formulate new strategies for the Lok Sabha elections.

More important are some long-term issues thrown up by the elections for the future growth of the party. A basic difficulty is that the BSP has not been able to establish, except in UP, a strong base in the other northern states despite a substantial dalit population that has in recent years experienced identity assertion. The growing antagonism between the Jats and the dalits in Punjab and to a lesser extent in Haryana and Rajasthan, the steady rise in the vote percentage of the BSP in Delhi, the split in the party and desertion by OBCs in Madhya Pradesh are indicative. It is significant that the BSP

has improved its vote percentage in all the four states despite a split in the party and a crisis of leadership due to the absence of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati's involvement in a corruption case. The UP experience indicates that powerful leadership, efficient organisation and sustained mobilization over a period of time leading to high levels of social awareness and politicisation are required to create a strong dalit party. Involved in coalitional politics in UP, the BSP leadership has not spent sufficient time and effort to establish strong cadres, carry out grassroots mobilization and harness the dalit upsurge in these states. Consequently, the party has grown in UP at the expense of its position in other states.

At the same time, Mayawati harbours ambitions of emerging as a key player on the national scene and the party under her leadership has since the mid-1990s pursued opportunistic strategies and alliances at the expense of party building. The two ambitions are contradictory and impose limitations on the party's expansion: it is caught between being an identity based movement of social uplift and transformation for its core supporters and an opportunistic party interested in a share in political power. The lack of a strong electoral base in the northern states deprives the BSP, a smaller party, of bargaining strength vis-à-vis the two bigger national parties in the regional and national political arena.

The BSP's ability to attract votes in north India in the future is also affected by the fact that in the December elections, more than identities based on caste and community that have dominated elections in north India for a decade, issues of governance and development played a central role. The BJP has decided not to use the Ram Mandir issue in the Lok Sabha elections and to focus on eco-

nomic development. In this situation a developmental focus rather than only swabhiman (self-respect) will be required to attract the BSP's core supporters and widen its base to 'others'.

Aclosely related issue is building alliances, crucial for small parties such as the BSP, which have a limited social base and yet have ambitions of capturing power. In a situation where no party is in a position to form a government at the Centre, dalit votes retain their importance in the coming Lok Sabha elections. Yet despite its desire to emerge as an important player in state and national politics, the BSP has not demonstrated an ability to form alliances outside UP where it has shared power with both the SP and BJP and formed a pre-poll alliance with the Congress. In the December elections the party leadership lost the opportunity to team up with the Congress party in Rajasthan, Delhi and Chhattisgarh which could have improved the position of both parties and placed them in a stronger negotiating position against the BJP in the coming national elections. Caught between the two national parties and without an alliance with either, the BSP performed badly.

But the reluctance of the BSP leadership to form pre-poll alliances is not entirely opportunistic. It arises from a realisation that an alliance with the Congress may not benefit it, but could lead to a transfer of dalit votes to the former. In north India, the Congress party except in UP and Madhya Pradesh, today represents a substantial section of the dalits in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi. Hence the latter is trapped between the need to expand its own base or to form an alliance with a bigger party that may help it to gain seats and share power in the northern states. This factor explains the hesitation on the part of the BSP to enter the 'secular' alli-

ance being formed by the Congress prior to the Lok Sabha elections. The BSP found the BJP, with its predominantly upper caste base, a congenial partner in UP, but due to the collapse of the coalition and its recent electoral success, the latter is no longer interested in an alliance with the BSP and feels it can attract at least a section of dalit votes in north India. Thus, the BSP's options for forming alliances are limited and may not help it realize its ambitions of influencing national politics.

In sum, with increasing polarization between the BJP and Congress, the room for smaller parties such as the BSP which hope to play a role at the national level to manoeuvre, formulate successful strategies and build alliances is shrinking. The BJP and the Congress are national parties with a base in many states and are able to attract a wide cross-section of supporters and electoral partners. The BSP is a much smaller player limited both by its size and narrow base beyond which it cannot attract much support. The challenge before the BSP leadership is how to expand its social base and emerge as the spokesman of the dalits in the northern states such that it can then bargain from a position of strength with the two major players on the national scene. This, as we have seen, is a difficult task involving grassroots mobilization and building strong party cadres. But its ambition of emerging as a key player on the national scene depends on it.

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Delhi election watch

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THE recently concluded elections to the Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram assemblies were the first to be held after the candidate disclosure system came into existence. Briefly stated, the system requires that persons contesting Parliament and assembly elections should swear an affidavit along with nomination papers, disclosing their assets and liabilities as also information about conviction for crimes pending against them in criminal cases.

Disqualification of candidates on conviction for certain offences is not new in our country. The Representation of People's Act, 1951, listed several offences under the Indian Penal Code as well as other laws like the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, Foreign Exchange Regulation Act of 1973, the Narcotic Drugs Act of 1985 or the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1988. Subsequently, offences under the Sati Prevention Act, the Prevention of Corruption Act and so on were also added. In many cases whether the sentence is only a fine or imprisonment, disqualification was for six years from the date of conviction.

Apart from these listed offences, the RP Act also provided that any person convicted for any offence and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more stood disqualified. In normal course, all these provisions should have been adequate to deter criminals from contesting elections. Yet, the dynamics of the election process are such as to substantially sideline the RP Act. The selection of candidates

and the filing of nominations have been controlled by cliques and kept outside public view or scrutiny. As a result of the Supreme Court's historic judgement of March 2003, the change now is that at least part of the nomination process is accessible to the public.

But even this limited step forward has become possible only by the determined struggle of civil society groups. The filing of a petition by the Association for Democratic Reforms in 1999 before the Delhi High Court, the court directing the Election Commission to set up a system for disclosure, the appeal of the government against this judgement, the Supreme Court upholding the judgement, and the government's determined effort to nullify that judgement by resorting to an ordinance are now part of legal history. The alliance of civil society groups under the banner of the National Campaign for Electoral Reforms and its successful challenge to the ordinance which was eventually struck down by the Supreme Court in March 2003 testifies to what concerted citizen action can accomplish.

Most citizens in the country take as granted that the right to vote is a basic feature of our democratic system. Yet, in the hearings before the Supreme Court the government argued that the right to vote was not a fundamental but only a statutory right, subject to statutory restrictions and that it was the prerogative of the Parliament to lay down those restrictions. Against this, the petitioners argued that the exercise of vote was part of a citizen's fundamental right of expression and the information required for the conscious exercise of that right could not be denied.

In its judgement the Supreme Court maintained a distinction between the 'right to vote' and 'freedom of voting' and held that voting was an

integral part of a citizen's right to expression and, for its proper exercise, the citizen enjoys the right to information as part of Article 19(1)(a). In the event the Supreme Court struck down the impugned ordinance and directed the Election Commission to take necessary steps for obtaining information from the candidates.

Between April and September 2003 the organisations which had participated in the public interest litigation met to decide on a programme to inform the public about the Supreme Court judgement as also mobilize public opinion for effective implementation of the disclosure regime. In June 2003, it was decided to set up DEW (Delhi Election Watch) as a coalition of 22 civil society organisations in Delhi. The experience of Gujarat, where during the assembly elections of 2002, an Election Watch had been set up, as well as the initiative of Lok Satta, Hyderabad, in regard to assembly elections in Andhra held earlier served as inspiration.

In September, DEW adopted a broad programme of activities including assistance in updating electoral rolls, organizing campaigns for increasing voter turnout, and ascertaining the background and information about candidates. It also set up a screening committee comprising of jurists, lawyers, retired civil servants, police officials and other leading citizens to systematically examine candidate antecedents and disseminate the findings.

A peculiar feature of the election process is that though the media is replete with accounts about likely candidates for weeks before the elections, there is nothing certain until the formal process of nomination commences. DEW attempted to intervene at the pre-nomination stage. One was to invite members of the public through

advertisements in the press and messages on television to share information about prospective candidates. Another was to write to all sitting MLAs, assuming they would be contesting again, to inform DEW about their financial and criminal antecedents, if any. We also wrote to all recognised political parties about the likely candidates requesting information about their antecedents. None of these attempts elicited much response.

The next stage was the nomination period from 10 to 14 November. The Supreme Court's orders stipulated that copies of the sworn affidavits by the candidates should be made available 'liberally and freely to other candidates, to the representatives of the media etc.' Though civil society organisations are not specifically mentioned in this order, the Election Commission clarified that the word 'etc.' included such organisations as well. This was an important interpretation. It may be recalled that during the Gujarat assembly elections some form of disclosure, limited to criminal antecedents, had already come into existence. Yet, Gujarat Election Watch found it difficult to obtain copies of the affidavits and succeeded only after repeated interventions by the Election Commission.

In the case of Delhi, the Election Commission issued a circular stating that 'NGOs like DEW and such other serious organisations may also be supplied with copies of the affidavits and counter affidavits free of cost.' This was a major step. But even thereafter, obtaining the copies was not easy, partly because the filing of nominations was bunched on the last two days. Out of over 1000 nominations, nearly 700 were filed on the last day, i.e. 14 November. The final list of valid nominations (817) became available only on 17 November, the last day for

withdrawal of nominations. Most returning officers and district election officers were positive and helpful to DEW though technical problems in obtaining photocopies persisted. In the end DEW collected 644 affidavits representing about 80% of the total number of valid nominations. The data was tabulated and analysed by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies on behalf of DEW.

What did the analysis reveal? In the 644 affidavits analysed, only 78 candidates had some record of criminal cases against them. Of these, five had been convicted, four discharged and in the balance 69 some cases were pending. Most cases related to offences against public tranquillity such as unlawful assembly, rioting and so on. Such cases are usually registered arising from political demonstrations of one kind or another. Only four cases related to murder, death by negligence and outraging the modesty of a woman. 42 out of the total of 69 candidates, belonged to various political parties while the rest were independents. Of these 42, 12 from the Congress and 10 from the BJP did win the election. Here again it was only in one case that the offence related to death by negligence. It would, therefore, appear that the pendency of the cases did not influence the outcome of elections. However, it is likely that the requirement of disclosure itself might have restrained political parties in nominating candidates with a 'criminal record' or those charged with serious crimes. It can therefore be said that at least in the Delhi election, the phenomenon of criminals as candidates did not loom large.

Overall the 644 candidates studied appeared to be of modest means. As many as 474 claimed that their movable assets were less than five lakh rupees while 58 had more than 20 lakh. Regarding immovable assets,

392 claimed their assets were less than five lakh rupees, while 142 admitted an asset base of more than 20 lakhs. An aggregation of both movable and immovable assets and listing the candidates as *crorepatis* or *lakhpati*s may be more intelligible to the public. Those with more than Rs 50 lakh were 53 while 49 had more than a crore. Of these, 32 were from the Congress and the BJP. Eighteen of the *crorepatis* won – three from BJP and 15 from Congress. At the other end of the spectrum, there were also some poor candidates in the fray, whose assets were less than a few thousand rupees. Obviously they relied only on faith to win the contest. There is no law in India barring the super rich or the struggling poor from contesting elections. Yet the disclosures of the candidates and the outcome of the elections point strongly to the role of money power.

Apart from information about criminal cases and finances, DEW also compiled data about educational qualifications. Of the 644 cases studied as many as 175 had postgraduate or professional degrees in engineering, medicine, chartered accountancy etc., while another 237 were graduates. Together this works out to 63%, indicating that a majority of candidates were not lacking in formal educational qualifications.

A series of tables summarizing information for Delhi state as a whole as well as constituency-wise information were prepared and released to the media a week before the elections. Coverage in the media was extensive. Did the information compiled and disseminated by DEW have any impact on the outcome of the elections? It must be emphasized that DEW, a coalition of civil society organisations, had no political agenda of its own and was not interested in influencing the outcome of the elections for or against

any political party. Its main purpose was to help better inform voters about the candidates.

Dissemination of information was therefore very important. While the party-wise tables for Delhi as a whole did receive significant attention from the media and various organisations, at the constituency level itself there was little dissemination even though data was available. Some newspapers in Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu did collect copies of the report containing the detailed information for all the constituencies. Reportedly a few even carried the information in their area or locality based editions. However, one of the stated objectives of DEW to disseminate information to the voters at the constituency-level remained largely unfulfilled.

A small effort was made to translate the constituency-wise information in Hindi in respect of five constituencies, i.e. Trinagar, Nangloi Jat, Mahipalpur, Tughlakabad and Patparganj where middle and lower income families were predominant. Volunteers were engaged to distribute copies of these data sheets to all the candidates in the constituency whose affidavits had been studied. Copies were also given to Resident Welfare Associations in the area. Our feedback from this small experiment is that while the candidates, as well as RWAs, were interested in the information provided, they did not have the time to further disseminate it among the voters. In future, a conscious effort should be made to provide constituency-wise information coterminous with state level information. This will of course require translation in locally used languages, advance arrangements with RWAs for distribution, as also deployment of volunteers to handle the work.

We used the mobile phone network to enable the voter to access

constituency-wise or candidate-wise information with help from the Hutch and Tata Indicom networks. A total of 2864 subscribers reportedly used these facilities.

One of DEW's programmes was to hold constituency-wise meetings through local organisations to which candidates from different parties would be invited to respond to voter's questions. This did not work out mainly because of the reluctance of local organisations in undertaking this task, the expenses involved and the generally poor response from the candidates themselves to participate in such neutral platforms. In one meeting held at the constituency level (Saket) by Abhilasha, a local organization, with the help of People's Action, the information pertaining to the candidates participating in the meeting was read out. Parivartan, a partner organisation of DEW, organized a similar meeting in the Seemapuri constituency. It may be noted that the victory margin in Saket was only 121 votes. Citizen organized platforms are a potentially strong instrument to ensure candidate responsiveness.

Though there were a large number of independents in the fray, the Delhi elections were a straightforward contest between the BJP and Congress. This did help in eliminating the large number of independents of whom only one candidate won. Other parties such as the BSP, CPI, CPM, NCP and JD (S) fielded a few hundred candidates but only two, one each from the NCP and JD (S) were successful. The straight contest also helped the winning candidates obtain credible margins. Across the country and over the decades, Parliament and assembly elections have been characterized by candidates winning by a minority of the votes cast. In the Delhi elections, 42 of the winners obtained more than

50% of the votes, while another 26% received between 40 to 50% votes. To that extent the winners can claim to be truly 'representative'.

Since the Delhi elections were one of the first to try out the efficacy of the disclosure system, it is useful to consider what improvements in the system are needed as borne out by DEW's experience. To begin with we may consider the adequacy of the disclosure proforma. The proforma regarding assets and liabilities needs some improvements. The basic objective of seeking this information, as borne out in the Supreme Court verdict, is to help voters get an idea of the financial position of the candidates as also serve as a benchmark to monitor any noticeable subsequent increase in assets, which could be ascribed to a misuse of the elected position. Newspaper reports prior to the nomination process indicated that some of the political parties were indeed taking a careful note of the disclosure requirements and were engaging chartered accountants and lawyers to brief candidates on how to fill the proforma.

Two glaring omissions however, were noticed. One is that neither the nomination papers nor the annexure referred to the occupation of the candidate or sources and extent of income. It is, therefore, virtually impossible to make even a preliminary assessment as to whether the assets declared are proportionate to known sources of income. The second relates to income tax. Any person who has a mobile phone, motor vehicle, immovable property, credit card, club membership or has travelled abroad is required to file an income tax return, whether or not income tax is actually liable to be paid – the 'one-in-six formula'. Though the Election Commission's proforma seeks information on income tax paid, assessment year upto

which income tax return has been filed and also the permanent account number (PAN), most candidates did not provide information in this regard and even where they did, the position was not clear.

Finally, our tabulation showed that out of 644 affidavits analysed, it was only in 140 cases that PAN and/or the year for which IT return had been filed was given. Some press reporters did pick this up and contacted some candidates for their reactions. It turned out that the proforma regarding IT return was not correctly filled out in such cases. This aspect can be easily remedied by introducing a few items of personal information such as occupation, income, PAN, whether an income tax payee or not and so on in the disclosure proforma. It is worth examining whether furnishing the PAN or information on filing the IT return should be a prerequisite for obtaining the nomination form.

There is significant overlap in the proforma relating to criminal antecedents. Part III of the main nomination form, in use for a long time, relates to convictions for offences which may disqualify a candidate. Form 26, introduced during the Gujarat assembly elections, seeks information about chargesheets filed and cognizance taken by courts for various offences. The affidavit added after the Supreme Court judgement in March 2003 also requires similar information about all criminal offences. A simpler form integrating these three different forms detailing information from FIR to chargesheet, trial, convictions or acquittal in the case of offences which might attract disqualification and separately in regard to other offences might be more user friendly, both for the candidate and the voter.

The effectiveness of any system of disclosure depends crucially on the

time available for dissemination and analysis of the information disclosed. Unfortunately the timetable for the elections as prescribed in the Representation of People's Act is rather rigid. Section 30 of the RP Act limits the campaign period to 14 days only. Proposals to extend this period is resisted by most political parties on grounds of increased election expenses. However, this argument need not apply to the nomination and pre-nomination stages. The five day period usually allowed for nominations is too brief. One could consider a two stage nomination. The first could be a pre-nomination stage similar to the primaries in the US. In this stage political parties should publish their list of candidates with as much personal information about the candidates, including criminal antecedents, as possible.

In the second stage the formal nomination process could begin. This too can be in two stages. The nomination papers should be made available only after candidates submit a 'personal particulars form', including occupation, income, PAN and so on. Allowing at least three working days for this process, the filing of nominations can begin thereafter. About ten working days should be given for the nomination process to be completed, including two days for scrutiny. The pre-nomination stage where political parties and individuals make known their intent about prospective candidates should minimally be three full weeks. The notification calling for elections, accordingly, will have to be issued earlier. The RP Act should be amended suitably for this purpose.

The pre-nomination stage will be taken seriously by candidates and parties only if it follows the public notice calling for elections. This will enable the public and civil society

organisations to engage in a search for better candidates and render the electoral system more participative from the beginning. It is worth considering whether there should be a provision for withdrawal as it encourages frivolous candidates to enter the fray and then withdraw for political or monetary inducements.

Voter turnout has been a problem in Indian elections, particularly for assembly and Parliament polls. Over the past few years, voter turnout in panchayat and municipal elections has been high, ranging from 60 to 75%. In contrast, the turnout in the Delhi assembly election was 53.39%. This is a couple of percentage points above the 1998 figures. In the Motinagar constituency, 62.34% voted while RK Puram maintained its reputation for the lowest turnout with 40.73%. Episodically, theories are advanced about the lack of choice among candidates and the 'disenchantment' of the urban voter with elections and politics as compared to his rural counterpart. Though the underlying theory maybe spurious the phenomenon itself heralds a bad portent for our democracy. One partner organisation of DEW publicised the message: 'If you don't vote, you don't count.' This message needs reiteration.

The Delhi Election Watch represents a modest beginning. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the partner organisations and volunteer workers, a credible effort could be mounted to increase voter awareness about disclosures. More importantly, political parties are now aware that future elections will have to be more open and that candidates cannot any more hide behind the opacity of party choice. The support of the Election Commission and the commitment of some civil society groups has made this possible, but much more remains to be done.

Monitoring disclosures

REETIKA KHERA

IN an attempt to curtail the citizen's right to know about the criminal and financial antecedents of electoral candidates, the Parliament tried to insert a controversial section (Section 33B) in the Representation of People's Act in 2002. This move had the support of the government and opposition parties. However, the ordinance was challenged by the Association of Democratic Rights (ADR) and by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL).¹ The Supreme Court passed an order on 13 March 2003 holding as unconstitutional the insertion of Section 33B in the Representation of People's Act.

This order pertains to the disclosure by electoral candidates of their

financial assets, outstanding debts, criminal records and educational attainment. All electoral candidates for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections, will now have to submit these details along with their nomination papers.²

Candidates are required to file, along with their nomination papers, affidavits that contain detailed information on the cash holdings, bank accounts, shares, bonds, debentures, mutual funds and so on held by them and their spouse(s), as well as their dependents. The affidavit to be submitted has four sections: first, the section on criminal cases against the candidate; second, a section on financial and other assets; third, a section on outstanding dues, and finally a section on educational attainments of the candidate. It has a separate column for the candidate, their spouse, and up to three dependents.

A separate row has been provided for agricultural and non-agricultural land, buildings, houses and apartments, land owned, its current market value, loans outstanding and

* I would like to thank all those who were a part of Rajasthan Election Watch in Jaipur. This paper is, in some ways, a compilation of their views on the process. I would also like to thank Arudra Burra, Nikhil De (and other members of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan), Jean Dreze, Vivek Ramkumar and Yogendra Yadav for reading and giving further suggestions for this paper. Thanks also to Asha Khera and Mythri Prasad for helping with the data analysis.

1. For an account of this debate, see Jayaprakash Narayan, 'Elections: disclosures now mandatory', India Together. <http://www.indiatogether.org/2003/mar/law-ncerscverd.htm>

2. In Rajasthan, the new disclosure norms do not apply to panchayat elections. However, in some other states, e.g. Karnataka, they apply to panchayat elections as well.

their source, government dues outstanding, etc. Thus, it is now possible for all voters to get information on the movable and immovable assets of each of their candidates. Besides this, details of criminal charges against, and convictions of, each candidate can also be obtained from the affidavits.

The Supreme Court's verdict has the potential to change the character/nature of elections and democracy in India. The disclosure of such information is vital because as citizens it is important for us to know about the people we elect to make policy. We need to know whether they are honest and capable of making the right decisions for us. The affidavit provides us another tool (apart from voting them out) to keep a tab on our representatives and to ensure some accountability especially vis-à-vis their sources of income.

Little is known about what drives a voter's decision. At best we can guess that caste factors, political parties, the candidate, etc. all play a role in making the decision. A recent study by CSDS found that in Rajasthan for a third of the voters the candidates were the most important factor in their voting decision.³ If it is true that many voters take the individual's character and background into account while making decisions, then the information in the affidavits is likely to be an important factor on which to base their choice. Even though candidates may (and do) lie in their affidavits, a false affidavit is also important infor-

mation for a voter. Voters of a constituency are quite likely to know quite a lot about their candidates and will be able to wean out the honest from the dishonest.

It seems plausible that criminalization of politics and the role of money and muscle power have been responsible for the growing apathy among some sections of voters in the country. This apathy contributes to weakening democracy. However, we have not been able to understand why such persons alone (i.e. those with money/muscle power) are given tickets by political parties. Armed with information for each candidate, we hope to understand what drives the process of giving tickets and selection of candidates adopted by various parties, and what the barriers to entry for better representatives are. It is also likely for it to be embarrassing for a political party to have everyone know that their candidates have criminal charges against them, or are fielding only very rich candidates.

While the potential uses of this order are varied and its impact can be powerful, actualizing it is not an easy task. This is so for many reasons, primary among which is that access to these documents is not easy.⁴ The affidavits are submitted to the relevant returning officers. Accessing these requires reasonable amount of motivation. Besides, after having accessed this information in time, some further work is required to verify the authenticity of the information provided by the candidates. As individuals this is possible only at one's local level. To get the larger picture of where our politicians stand vis-à-vis their financial

status and criminal records, we need to compile and collate the information at the district and state level. The effort that this requires makes it difficult for individual citizens to accomplish.

Keeping in mind these difficulties in accessing and collating information from affidavits, Aastha, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Barefoot College, URMUL, Vividha, and other civil society groups from different parts of Rajasthan created a platform – The Rajasthan Election Watch. The purpose was to gain access to all the affidavits for the contestants of the Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha elections held on 1 December 2003. The intention/plan was to gather these affidavits and understand how the information contained in them could be of use to voters and other citizens. We wanted to simplify and demystify the information provided therein and explore the possible ways in which the information contained in these affidavits could be used to strengthen and deepen the electoral, and larger democratic, process.

For immediate use, we decided to do the following: one, make a one-page summary for each constituency, containing information about each candidate—the number of cases against him/her, their financial assets, agricultural and non-agricultural landholdings, and value of jewellery owned. It was hoped that member groups would use this to distribute as *parchas* in the relevant constituency for voters to know their candidates. Second, for each election division within the state, and for the state as a whole, we prepared wealth rankings (based on land, cars and jewellery owned) for dissemination through the press. Third, some groups like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan used the constituency summary sheets to organize *jan manches* in Beawar, Bhim and .

3. Yogendra Yadav and Sanjay Kumar (2003), 'A strategy of micro-management pays off for the BJP', *The Hindu*, 9 December. For an analysis of the Rajasthan election, see Yogendra Yadav, 'Understanding the Rajasthan elections 2003', *The Hindu*. Election Commission of India, 'Statistical Report on General Election, 1998 to State Assembly of Rajasthan', available at http://www.eci.gov.in/infoeci/key_stat/keystat_fs.htm

4. As it turned out, in our case accessing these documents was not difficult in most cases. We found that government officials did not create any trouble in providing access to these documents.

Rajsamand. Charts stating the financial assets of each candidate were displayed at the site of the public meeting where all the contestants were invited to answer questions from the electorate. Here, the candidates were questioned about, among other things, their criminal records and wealth.

For the longer term, the idea was to create a database for use *after* the elections by all interested persons: e.g. *jan sunwais* can be organized where information from the affidavit of any person/constituency is verified in detail and then presented before the public. The data will allow a follow-up five years later during the next elections to see how the position of the winners has changed.

An interesting aspect of Rajasthan Election Watch was that the process was as much of an achievement and an education as the outputs that were generated by the process. The process involved various tasks: gathering the affidavits from the 200 constituencies of the state; sending them across to Jaipur (the headquarters for this campaign); reading them and making sense of how the information could be used so as to be meaningful to as large a number and variety of ordinary voters; and finally, putting the information out in the public arena to help initiate a debate around these issues.

Also notable is the fact that the entire effort was carried out by volunteers from rural and urban areas. The volunteers ranged, in age, from 18 to more than 60 years. They included youngsters from rural areas who were excited about using computers and interacting with others from their state, as well as retired government officials, researchers, lawyers and journalists, among others.

Nomination papers began to be filed from 7 November 2003 and the last date for withdrawal of papers was

17 November. Elections were held on 1 December 2003. This gave us between 15-25 days in which to accomplish the short-term objective of preparing constituency summaries and state-wide rankings for dissemination through the press and other channels. To meet our objective of disseminating this information in a reader-friendly manner before votes were cast, we had less than two weeks from the date of final withdrawal of nomination papers.

We divided the state into six divisions based on the structure of the Election Commission. Persons from various walks of life took charge of collecting the affidavits from their division and sending them across to us in Jaipur. Those responsible included doctors, journalists, persons from PUCL, NGOs and activists. We ran the entire programme on a budget of about Rs 60,000 raised by NCPRI and others through personal contributions. This meant that we could not afford luxuries such as couriers. But we managed to come up with a system just as efficient: handing copies of the affidavits to bus drivers and conductors who would pass them on in Jaipur.

Once the affidavits started flooding our temporary office in Jaipur, they were meticulously numbered and assigned a unique identity. We functioned as an assembly line. We had prepared a 'code sheet' where the information was written in a more systematic and standardized manner than it was in the affidavit, so that the data entry would be smooth. For instance, while transferring data from the affidavit to the code sheet, volunteers were asked to convert agricultural land into *bighas*, and non-agricultural land into square feet. Since many of the affidavits were not legible, we had a magnifying glass doing the rounds to improve our chances of gleaning

information from the affidavits. Each team had a conversion chart to help them convert square yards into square feet and hectares into bighas wherever necessary.

One group of volunteers was responsible for transferring information from the affidavits to the code sheets; the next group to 'feed' these code sheets and enter the data from them onto spreadsheets. Once this exercise was complete for any particular election division, the data was ready for division analysis and to prepare the constituency summary sheets. These constituency summary sheets were then given to another group of volunteers to check against the original affidavit for each candidate. If any discrepancies were spotted, another round of corrections began. Once this was done, we were ready to prepare the division rankings and the final summary sheets to be sent to the constituencies.

While it all sounds very smooth, newcomers who visited the office-cum-residence were overwhelmed by the hectic activity and chaos that prevailed. On any given day there were approximately 60 volunteers working in the office during the day, and about 15 people working and sleeping there in the night. Since not all volunteers were equally adept at handling numbers, each team worked on a different section of the affidavit: there were two volunteers who worked on the criminal section, girls from Kanodia College worked on the education section, teachers from Shiksha Niketan (SWRC) worked on the conversions, and so on. For this too there were shifts: some shifts worked during the day, others during the night.

Out of the 1541 candidates in the fray for the Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha elections 2003, we were able to get the affidavits of close to 1000 candi-

dates. Of these, we were able to use around 950 in our analysis. The loss was because many of the records were either illegible, poorly photocopied, or incorrectly filled and therefore useless for our purposes.

The incompleteness of information provided in the affidavits raises an interpretational issue. Are blanks to be taken as zeros or should they be separated out from the analysis. In the rankings, we have stated how many turned up as blanks and those who reported having no assets. Blanks have been treated as 'information not available' rather than as 'zeros'.

We decided to present the data for agricultural land and non-agricultural land separately. We have reported agricultural land in *bighas* and non-agricultural land holdings (whether in rural or urban areas) in square feet. As land measures vary across the state, we had to apply a standard rate to make the data comparable across candidates and constituencies. The appendix contains the conversion rates applied for converting land into *bighas*.

Similarly, in the case of jewellery, the amount of gold owned was reported in *tolas* at times and in grams at others. We have converted *tolas* into grams for our analysis. When the value of jewellery was not stated, we left that as blank. We did not apply the market rates to the amount of gold or silver reported by the candidates. Thus, our analysis, if at all will tend to underestimate the value of their jewellery and indeed other assets such as property.

There are 200 constituencies in Rajasthan. The two main political parties in the fray this time were the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress (I). Both parties were contesting almost all the seats in the state. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) and

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) were the main new entrants in Rajasthan politics in these elections.

Criminal Records: We were able to use 954 affidavits for studying the criminal antecedents of the contestants. We compiled the list of contestants with criminal records from this (see Table 1). The reference to 'criminal records' here means not only those who have been convicted but also those charged with various crimes. This list shows that there were 124 candidates with criminal records in the fray. Of these, 39 were fielded by the BJP, 16 by the Congress, 23 were independents. The remaining were mainly from BSP, RSNM, JD(U). Madan Dilawar of the BJP from Atru (Baran) topped the list with 17 cases against him followed closely by Bansilal Khatik from Rajsamand in South Rajasthan with eight cases. Incidentally, Madan Dilawar was hoping to be re-elected and both of them won the elections.

The number of cases against a candidate needs to be interpreted with some caution. First, the range of crimes for which candidates have been booked varies tremendously. We therefore looked at the sections and acts under which they were booked as well. We classified crimes as 'serious' and other crimes. Some of the crimes that were classified as serious include dacoity (Section 395 of IPC), robbery (Section 392 of IPC), injuring or defiling a place of worship or uttering words with intent to insult the religion of any class (Sections 295 and 298), house trespass (Section 457), arson, attempt to murder (Section 307), Section 6(3) of the Sati Nivaran Act, Section 9 of the Opium Act and Sections of the Explosives Act.

Second, in some instances, false cases may be registered against an aspirant. For instance, it is quite pos-

sible that politicians who were earlier trade unionists have false cases booked against them. Or, some persons may have been booked because of participation in demonstrations against the

TABLE 1

Name of political party	Party-wise Contestants and Contestants with Criminal Records*	
	Total number of contestants	Number of contestants with criminal record
ABCDC(A)	2	1
ABRAHP	2	1
AITMC	1	0
BJP	162	39
BNJD	1	0
BRVP	2	0
BSP	67	10
CPI	12	1
CPI(ML)(L)	2	0
CPM	8	4
CPI(ML)	2	1
FCI	1	0
INC	176	16
IND	255	21
INL	1	0
INLD	28	8
IRP	1	0
JD(S)	4	4
JD(U)	10	0
JP	3	0
LJNSP	16	0
LPSP	1	1
NCP	29	3
NDP	1	0
RAM	1	0
RBSP	2	0
RJD	3	0
RKB	1	0
RLD	25	1
RMP	1	0
RPD	12	1
RSNM	32	2
RSP	1	0
SHS	16	4
SJP	1	0
SP	40	5
SVP	2	0
TOTAL	924	124

* There are 1541 aspirants in the Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha 2003 elections, for which we have received 954 affidavits. We were able to use only 924 affidavits because the rest were incomplete, illegible, or for other related reasons.

government. The crimes that we put under this category included Sections 143, 147, 148, 149, 323, 332 (related to unlawful assembly, rioting, obstructing a public servant in discharge of duty, etc). A large number of candidates with any criminal record have been booked under these sections.

This classification revealed that as many as 40% of those with some criminal records had been booked under 'serious' crimes. In the list of serious crimes too, the BJP tops with 19 out of 43 such candidates. The list with serious crimes included people such as Ramzaan Khan of the BJP, MLA from Pushkar (who has not been re-elected) and who had earlier been convicted for three years under the Opium Act in Ajmer. Also Bharosi Lal of the Indian National Congress who has been booked under a wide variety of serious crimes. The list of crimes includes punishment for rioting, mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to cause damage, intent to destroy house, assault on woman with intent to outrage her modesty, attempt to commit culpable homicide, kidnapping, abducting or inducing a woman to compel her into marriage, cheating, forgery, using a forged document as genuine.

There were three candidates who had been booked for crimes against women. Another seven had been booked for economic crimes.

Financial assets: The section on movable and immovable assets (in the affidavit) of a candidate excites most interest, but is also the most incom-

plete and controversial section of the affidavit. With criminal records, it is easy to access government records to get at the truth. Financial data is probably the most difficult to verify.

The biggest revelation is the extent to which candidates try to avoid revealing their actual total assets. Different means are employed to conceal their assets: this includes writing illegibly (requiring the use of magnifying glasses), submitting incomplete forms (more on this below), undervaluing property and jewellery, and so on.

In the case of movable and immovable assets there are many ways in which the candidates seek to get away with revealing as little as possible. Some do not state some/all of their assets. For example, there are seven candidates who claim to have no

financial assets at all.⁵ This is especially difficult to believe because six of them report, in the same affidavit, land or jewellery worth more than Rs 1,00,000. For instance, Suresh Chand of RSNM reports land worth Rs 14 lakh; Jagtar Singh of the Congress jewellery worth Rs 1.3 lakh. The lone candidate to have reported no assets of any kind is Seva Ram Jatav. One wonders who paid the Rs 5000 deposit required for filing nomination papers.

Such anomalies are not difficult to find. For instance, at the other end of the spectrum of wealth distribution we found eleven crorepatis who claim that they own no vehicle. This includes the ex-chief minister Ashok Gehlot and the new chief minister, Vasundhara Raje Scindia.

TABLE 2

Name of political party	Party-wise Distribution of Declared Value of Total Assets*				Total
	Less than Rs 1,00,000	Between Rs 1,00,000 and Rs 25,00,000	Between Rs 25,00,000 and Rs 1,00,00,000	More than Rs 1,00,00,000	
BJP	2	68	81	15	166
BSP	6	44	16	2	68
CPI	6	13	4	0	23
CPI(ML)(L)					
CPM					
CPI(ML)					
INC	0	58	88	32	178
INLD	0	17	11	1	29
JD(S)	0	3	0	0	3
JD(U)	0	7	3	0	10
JP	1	2	0	0	3
LJNSP	2	11	1	0	14
NCP	4	19	6	1	30
RJD	1	3	0	0	4
RLD	4	14	3	4	25
RPD	2	7	1	1	11
RSNM	0	27	5	1	33
SHS	4	10	1	1	16
SP	7	30	4	1	42
Others	8	13	1	0	22
IND	49	150	43	14	256
TOTAL	95	497	268	73	933

* Others includes ABCDC(A), ABRAHP, AITMC, BNJD, BRVP, FCI, INL, IRP, LPSP, NDP, RAM, RBSP, RKP, RMP, RSP, SJP, SVP.

5. The category of financial assets includes cash, bank balances, other investments such as shares, bonds, debentures, mutual funds, etc. held by the candidate, their spouse and dependents.

6. Similar tactics have been used in the case of jewellery where weight of gold/silver may be reported but values are missing.

The reporting of land of various types becomes tricky, more a game of hide-and-seek. Many candidates reported the area of their holdings, but not its value. Others decided to report the value and not the area.⁶ Yet others, only how many pieces of land they had without giving details of either area or value of property or its location. Those who reported the value of property – whether agricultural land, or non-agricultural land, or houses, apartments – used their own estimates of prices in the area rather than the current market value. For instance, one candidate owns a shop on MI Road in Jaipur, one of the busiest and most expensive market areas in the heart of the city, and valued it at just Rs 3,00,000. Such inconsistencies are common.

The incompleteness of the information provided by the contestants makes it difficult to use it for sophisticated statistical analysis. However, it offers great potential for follow-up action on how and where and in what ways information has been concealed by the electoral candidates. Their affidavits can be used to start an ‘investigation’ and file counter-affidavits to expose the lies (an offence under Section 182 of the IPC). Another interesting exercise would be to compare the total assets of the candidates as stated in this election with their declared assets five years down the line.

Even the incomplete affidavits, however, serve as an eye-opener: in Rajasthan there are at least 73 self-declared *crorepatis* among the 933 candidates for whom we have somewhat complete information. Among the (self-declared) *crorepatis*, it is the

7. The reservation of seats is based on rules set down by the Representation of People’s Act, Section 330. The number of reserved seats are in proportion to the share of the SCs, and the STs, population in the total population.

Congress (I) that dominates in numbers. Nearly half of these *crorepatis* are from the Congress, with BJP in second place with 15 *crorepatis* (see Table 2). It must be borne in mind that the presence of these two parties in the *crorepati* list could be either due to them having reported their assets more correctly than others and/or to actually being at the top of the ladder. Given the information we have at present, it is not possible to say anything about the veracity or completeness of the information provided in the affidavits.

Out of the 73 *crorepatis*, as many as 21 were incumbents. The *crorepatis* are also well represented in the group with 28 winners. When one looks at

party-wise averages, the Congress tops the list again. The average value of total assets of all Congress contestants is Rs 73 lakh, followed by the BJP with an average value of assets at Rs 51 lakh.

As far as agricultural land holdings are concerned, about 740 candidates provided some information. Jitendra Singh tops the list when we consider the value of agricultural land (his is valued at just over Rs 6 crore). Such rankings were prepared for non-agricultural land holdings as well as for number of vehicles owned and value of jewellery.

Outstanding debts: Approximately 600 candidates declared having no outstanding debts. The average

TABLE 3

Name of political party	Illiterate	Upto primary	Upto Secondary	Upto Senior secondary	Graduates	Post-graduates	Other
BJP	0 0	14 11	10 13	21 13	27 41	22 21	31 3
BSP	0 0	9 18	8 28	9 14	6 25	6 14	8 2
CPI(ML)	0 0	1 10	2 30	2 20	0 0	2 20	8 10
INC	13 1	16 11	12 15	20 11	23 33	29 26	31 3
IND	44 3	33 18	36 33	24 10	20 21	19 13	23 1
INLD	6 4	3 14	4 29	1 4	4 36	3 14	0 0
LJNSP	0 0	1 11	2 33	1 11	1 22	1 22	0 0
NCP	6 4	4 20	5 40	1 4	2 20	2 12	0 0
RLD	6 5	5 29	1 5	1 5	3 29	4 29	0 0
RSNM	0 0 0	3 11 11	2 15 15	1 4 4	6 52 52	3 19 19	0 0 0
SHS	0 0	1 7	5 16	2 13	1 20	0 0	0 0
SP	6 3	2 6	9 53	4 12	2 15	3 12	0 0
Total	2	14	25	11	28	18	2

* First row is column percentage (i.e. out of all illiterate candidates what proportion come from a particular party); second row shows the level of education of candidates from a party.

debt is Rs 1.7 lakh. Naren Sahni tops the list with outstanding debts of just over Rs 3 crore. He is followed by Atar Singh, Brij Kishore and Gurmeet Singh who have debts in the range of Rs 70-90 lakh.

Education: Out of the 950 candidates, about 15% did not provide information about their educational attainment. Of those for whom this information is available, only two percent are illiterate. Nearly a third were graduates and one-fifth of the candidates were post-graduates (see Table 3).

This section uses caste information to get some clues about how well each caste group is represented in the elec-

toral process. In the Rajasthan Assembly, 143 seats are general seats, 33 seats are reserved for scheduled castes and 24 for scheduled tribes.⁷ The Rajasthan State Election Commission also provides information on the caste of each candidate. Table 4 shows the preponderance of 'general' castes in the elections. Out of the 954 candidates for whom we had information on caste and party affiliation, more than two-third (64%) were from the general castes. Around one-fifth of the candidates were from the scheduled castes, and 13% were tribals. According to the 1991 census, SCs accounted for 17% of the total population of the state, whereas STs comprised 12%. Thus, the number of candidates from

these communities compares quite favourably with their share in the population of Rajasthan.

However, this should not lead us to believe that the SCs and STs are well represented in the elections. Most (80%) of the SCs and STs contesting the elections are doing so from reserved seats. Most of the ST candidates belong to south Rajasthan where tribals form the majority of the population, and where most of the reserved ST seats are. It is rare that a person from the SC or ST contests an unreserved seat. Out of the 291 candidates who belonged to either scheduled castes or scheduled tribes, only 65 (approximately 20%) were contesting from unreserved seats. Generally, candidates from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been successful in getting tickets from the major parties largely

due to the policy of reservation of seats for SCs and STs.

The reservation policy thus seems to have had mixed success. On the one hand, it has ensured that SCs and STs do get representation in electoral politics. However, it seems to have driven political parties to giving them representation only in the reserved seats. The tendency to give socially underprivileged castes tickets only in reserved seats seems to have been followed by most parties. The BJP and the Congress fielded only two candidates each (both STs) from unreserved seats. The BSP fielded the most number of SCs and STs from unreserved seats. Ten out of the 67 candidates that the BSP fielded are SCs or STs contesting from unreserved seats.

It is interesting that apart from social disadvantage suffered by these groups, their economic disadvantage is also apparent in electoral politics. To capture one aspect of this, we calculated the average total declared value of assets for each caste group. Here again, the general castes top the list with average total assets worth Rs 46 lakh, more than twice the average for SCs (Rs 17 lakh) or STs (Rs 20 lakh).

This section briefly describes some of the differences between the outgoing Vidhan Sabha and the newly elected assembly. The Congress had been in power since 1999 in Rajasthan with 153 MLAs (out of a total of 200) and the BJP was the main opposition party with 33 members. The position of these two parties has been somewhat reversed after the 2003 elections. Currently, the BJP has bagged 120 seats and the Congress has been left with just 56 seats. The rout of the Congress is being blamed, among other reasons, on the anti-incumbency factor and poor selection of candidates. For the 142 seats for which data is available with us, this anti-incumbency trend is

Name of political party	Number of contestants*	Caste group		
		General	SC	ST
BJP	150	103	28	19
BSP	61	34	15	12
CPI	10	7	2	1
CPI(ML)(L)	2	0	0	2
CPM	8	5	2	1
CPI(ML)	2	1	1	0
INC	156	107	28	21
INLD	23	15	6	2
JD(S)	4	1	3	0
JD(U)	8	3	2	3
JP	3	1	0	2
LJNSP	14	8	6	0
NCP	29	15	5	9
RJD	4	4	0	0
RLD	21	13	8	0
RPD	12	9	2	1
RSNM	29	23	5	1
SHS	16	13	2	1
SP	37	23	7	7
Others	21	15	4	2
IND	223	140	56	27
TOTAL	831	540	182	109

* There are 1541 contestants from Rajasthan for which we received 903 affidavits. We were not able to use all the affidavits because some were incomplete, illegible, or for other reasons. The information presented in this table is for those 831 candidates for whom we have full information on caste and party affiliation.

clearly visible with only 30% candidates retaining their seats for a second term. Only 16% of Congress MLAs were re-elected, whereas more than 40% of the BJP candidates managed to get re-elected.

One-third of the contestants were either SC or ST. In the new Vidhan Sabha, one-third of the seats have been won by them. This high 'success rate' (i.e. proportion of candidates contesting to candidates winning) is not surprising, given the fact that most of the SC and ST stood from reserved seats.

The newly elected state assembly has, on average, younger representatives than in the previous assembly. The major change with respect to the age structure over the previous Vidhan Sabha is that the proportion of MLAs aged above 60 has declined from 34% to 22% and that of the under 40 age group has risen by about 7%. Given that the shift has been from Congress to BJP legislators it appears that, on average, Congress ones are older than BJP legislators. Overall though, the assembly remains dominated by older, rather than younger representatives. More MLAs are aged over sixty years (22%), than are under the age of forty. Less than a fifth of the new legislators are under the age of 40. The majority (60%) of MLAs are between 40-60 years of age.

TABLE 5

Distribution of Winners by Total Wealth*			
Total assets	Losers	Winners	Total
Less than Rs 1,00,000	50	1	51
Between Rs 1,00,000 and Rs 25,00,000	229 (79)	62 (21)	291
Between Rs 25,00,000 and Rs 1,00,00,000	112 (61)	71 (39)	183
More than Rs 1,00,00,000	28 (50)	28 (50)	56
Total	419	162	581

* Figure in brackets indicate what proportion (%) of candidates in each class have won/lost the elections.

The importance of wealth in contesting elections and especially in winning them is brought out by the results. Table 5 shows a striking correspondence between the wealth category that a candidate belongs to and the probability of winning. As one rises up the wealth ladder, the probability of winning the election increases. It is highest for those who are self-declared crorepatis and the least for those who do not even make it to the rank of *lakhpatis*. Only one candidate out of 51 who declared assets worth less than Rs 1,00,000 won the election.

The gender composition too is not very encouraging: in the previous assembly, there were 14 women legislators of which 13 were from the Congress. In this election, the number of women legislators has declined to 11. The only gain, however, is that the current government is headed by a woman. The number of women contesting the elections has declined in these elections.

Some problems in the format of the affidavits have already been highlighted above. The first problem is that each candidate has reported his/her assets according to *their* interpretation of the information that is being asked for. Thus, in the case of non-agricultural land, one finds cases of non-agricultural rural and urban land; there is no way of ascertaining the quality of the land from the affidavits submitted by the candidate. In the case of agricultural land, there is no information about whether it is irrigated or unirrigated. It is important to issue some simple guidelines regarding how the affidavits need to be filled up.

The units in which land and gold and silver

have been reported are not standard. In the case of agricultural land, it has been reported in bighas, acres, hectares etc. In the case of non-agricultural land, it has been reported in square feet, square yards, square meters, bighas, etc. Every imaginable unit of measurement has been used. The rate at which property has been evaluated is also not standard. Standardized rates are available from the collector's office and it should be mandatory for candidates to use these rates. Also for candidates to provide complete information for each of the assets that they declare.

The biggest problem, however, is that we were unable to verify the information provided in the affidavits. The next step in this exercise would be to check the various ways in which candidates have understated, or used the affidavit to conceal rather than reveal. Assets have been hidden by undervaluing them, by giving incomplete information, and by simply not listing some assets.

Hopefully, in the coming months, the information that we have collected and compiled will be available on the internet and disseminated through parchas in all the relevant constituencies. We hope to create an interactive website where people can inform us about under-reporting of assets, lying about criminal records, and so on. In some cases, it is hoped that counter-affidavits will be filed against the candidates who have lied. Public hearings will be held to demonstrate the lies reported by the winners in their affidavits. These lies are related to various sections of their affidavits (not reporting some/all criminal charges against them, undervaluing property, lying about educational attainments). It is hoped that such public hearings will introduce a system of vigilance by citizens as well as political parties.

Dynamics of electoral victories

JAI MRUG

THE call for early elections is based on the premise that a 'feel good' factor would lead to a hands down vote for Vajpayee. The 1999 elections were fought in the backdrop of the Kargil war; these elections are sought to be fought in the realm of a suggested boom in the economy. However, many election results that suggest an apparent sweep can be deconstructed to near arithmetical alignments of the vote bases of the aligning parties. In a fragmented polity these alignments represent the coming together of newfound political identities to best leverage the marginal vote that they carry. Thus an arithmetical deconstruction and reconstruction of electoral data provides rich insight into possibilities for the future. Such hypotheses have gained increasing importance given the emergence of smaller parties in the recent polls. The impact of such smaller parties is now ana-

lysed in the context of the ensuing Lok Sabha polls.

Indian states can be neatly dissected into two types – those states where the polity is polarized largely between two mainstream parties (such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Delhi) and states where the polity is polarised largely between two stable fronts (Kerala). States such as Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab and Haryana are also akin to two party systems where the non-Congress parties have complete seat adjustments or full-fledged alliances. However, states that do not have stable fronts (Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Maharashtra) or a where bipolarity is absent (Uttar Pradesh), provide ample space for arithmetical play and alliance politics. So far these states have provided the NDA with more than a third of its MPs and it is here that the real battle will be

fought. Together these states sent 124 NDA members to Parliament last time.

It should be noted that the alliance partners being sought by the Congress primarily have their influence in these states: the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the RJD in Bihar and Jharkhand, and the NCP in Maharashtra. The BJP is trying to negotiate Kalyan Singh's re-entry into the party in Uttar Pradesh, while it is critically dependent on its allies in the other states: the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the JD(U) in Bihar, and the Dravidian allies in Tamil Nadu. In Jharkhand the party is trying to woo the JMM into its fold. If the Congress succeeds in sewing up an alliance with the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the NCP in Maharashtra, it will have placed itself well at the end of the first round of the battle.

Tamil Nadu is perhaps one state where the NDA could suffer a severe blow, simply because of the lack of allies. Ever since the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, this state has shown a tendency to vote in favour of arithmetically loaded fronts. In 1998, the Jayalalitha-BJP front had PMK and MDMK, in addition to the local influence of leaders such as Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthy and P.R. Kumaramangalam. This front scored a surprising victory against the DMK-TMC-CPI alliance. That was the beginning of arithmetical elections in the state. The ADMK front scored 47% votes against the DMK led front's 42%. In 1999, Jayalalitha led a weaker front with just the Congress and the Left, while the rest of her allies (minus Subramaniam Swamy) migrated lock, stock and barrel to the DMK front leaving the TMC in the lurch. This time the DMK front polled a little over 47%, while the ADMK-Congress-Left alliance polled a little below 42%. This was an election that the nation called the Kargil election.

But the Tamil Nadu election results were nothing but cold arithmetic.

This trend was reinforced in the 2001 state elections, when Jayalalitha established an eleven percentage point lead over the DMK by lining up almost all parties that mattered in the state (barring of course the DMK and the MDMK) in her favour. The ADMK led front consisting of the Congress, Left, PMK and the TMC (now merged with the Congress) polled close to 50% of the votes. As of now the DMK has a similar line up. With the PMK choosing to make common cause with the DMK it shall be disaster for the BJP-ADMK front.

The absence of the PMK in the DMK led front would have been a natural invitation to the Dalit parties, PT (Pudhiya Tamizhagam) and DPI (Dalit Panthers of India) to ally with the DMK front or offer support to them. These parties have always been in conflict with the PMK. In fact, supporters of the DPI have always been in direct conflict with the supporters of the PMK in northern Tamil Nadu. In the south the PT has been critical of the Thevars, who are alleged sympathizers of the ADMK. Together these parties command at least three percent support statewide. Whichever way these parties go, the DMK led front now has a near assured support of 50% or more.

The chances of the BJP led alliance do not therefore appear as bright in Tamil Nadu. Government employees, hit hard by the crackdown on their strike, may get back at the ADMK, further reducing the chances of a BJP-ADMK victory. What effect the Vajpayee 'feel good' factor will have in Tamil Nadu therefore remains to be seen. The DMK led front could comfortably end up with more than 30 of the state's 39 seats.

In Maharashtra, a prospective NCP-Congress alliance with a little help from the Dalit parties – the RPI (Republican Party of India), the BBM (Bharatiya Bahujan Mahasangh), and the Samajwadi Party could severely limit the chances of the Sena-BJP alliance which won 28 out of the 48 seats in the state in 1999. A grand alliance in 1998 had reduced the Sena-BJP to a mere 10 seats, despite a nationwide wave in favour of Vajpayee. In 1998, the Sena-BJP polled an all time high 43% of the votes, but near total unity by the opposition led to a landslide in favour of the Congress. The Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) in Maharashtra then stood at 0.88.

In 1999, the BJP-Sena polled 38% of the votes but won 28 seats, facing an all time low IOU of 0.53. The low IOU was largely due to the formation of the NCP. Taking 1999 as the base, a mere unity of the Congress and the NCP could well take the IOU above 0.8, making life difficult for the Sena-BJP. There is no independent estimate of the anti-incumbency factor against the state government that could positively impact the chances of the Sena-BJP. However, an alliance of the Congress, NCP and smaller parties certainly dims the prospects of the NDA in Maharashtra.

Bihar and Jharkhand returned a large number of NDAMPs (41) to the Lok Sabha. In 1999, the NDA polled an all-time high of 45.48% in Bihar with a perfect seat adjustment. The BJP contested 29 seats, leaving 23 for the JD(U) and two for the Bihar People's Party led by Anand Mohan. The front led by the RJD consisted of the Indian National Congress, CPM and MCO (Marxist Co-ordination). They together polled 38.08% of the votes. As far as the NDA is concerned a crucial difference between the 1998 Lok Sabha polls when it won 30 seats and

the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, when it won 41 seats was the Ram Vilas Paswan-Sharad Yadav factor.

In 1998, the two contested as JD candidates supported by the Samata Party, an indirect alliance of sorts. But that was not a full-fledged alliance. The NDA then polled 40% of the votes. In 1999, the two formally joined the NDA, largely enhancing the vote share (45%) as well as the seat share of the NDA. The seat most symbolic of the NDA sweep was Madhepura, where Laloo Prasad Yadav lost to Sharad Yadav. Ever since the Gujarat riots, Paswan has parted ways with the NDA and is now being wooed by both the fronts. His movements will certainly impact the chances of the NDA to say the least.

Moreover, the anti-NDA camp would require to accommodate a number of smaller parties to decisively beat the NDA in Bihar. The CPI has strong pockets of influence in the state but has been opposed to the Laloo regime on the ground. The CPI(ML) is no less influential and so are the splinter factions of the JMM. However, these need to be brought together and welded into a force with the same precision as the NDA. In undivided Bihar the CPI, CPI(ML), BSP and the JMM together polled 8.25% of the vote. These parties are of extreme importance if the Congress is to give a serious fight to the NDA. Nevertheless, given the quarrels within the Janata parivar, it is unlikely that the NDA would romp home to a stupendous victory such as last time.

Uttar Pradesh holds the key to 80 Lok Sabha MPs. The BJP was badly mauled in the last Lok Sabha elections in UP with the disappointed urban voters and differences between Kalyan Singh and Vajpayee. In undivided Uttar Pradesh, the party polled a mere 27.64% of votes in 1999, a far cry from

the 36.5% the party polled in 1998. Its seat share halved from 57 to 29. The SP too plummeted from 28.7% to 24% but increased its seat tally from 20 to 26. The INC made huge gains raising its vote share from 6% to 14.72% and winning 10 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

In a multipolar state like UP, the outcome is largely dependent upon the concentration of party support in a particular region of the state and the differential lead it has over its nearest rival. From 1991 to 1998, it was the BJP which was largely the beneficiary of the first past the post system. However, in 1999 it was the SP and the BSP who reaped large benefits. The SP gained with a falling vote share and the BSP's tally rose from 4 to 14 with a mere gain of two per cent points in its vote share. The party increased its vote share from 20% to 22%. The BJP fared poorly inspite of a low Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) – 0.33.

In the strange terrain that is Uttar Pradesh, the biggest loser due to a potential BSP-Congress alliance could be the SP. The BSP-Congress alliance could wean away a large number of minority voters and other anti-NDA forces from the SP. Taking 1999 as the base, a BSP-Congress alliance could increase the Index of Opposition Unity (calculated against the BJP) to 0.51. The BSP could particularly benefit from the alliance with the Congress in western UP, eastern UP and the areas bordering Nepal. It is in these regions that the Congress-BSP synergy has the potential to swing many minority voters from the SP and consolidate their gains. While the BJP may gain from the potential re-entry of Kalyan Singh, some of its gains could be offset due to the Congress-BSP alliance. Smaller parties like the Apna Dal could add a couple of seats to any party that allies with them. Though not placed poorly, the BJP is

not poised for an exactly sterling performance in UP. Gains for them could be moderate.

In addition to the above states, the BJP has to make do with anti-incumbency sentiments against its allies, primarily in Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, and a continually declining base in Karnataka. With the AGP refusing to ally with the BJP in Assam, catching up with Congress may not be as easy. If the TRS (Telangana Rakshana Samiti) chooses to ally with the Congress, it could be a big setback to the NDA in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh. The NDA has to contend with this in addition to the fact that the TDP has been ruling Andhra Pradesh for the past nine years. Moreover, the Left may also align with the Congress in Andhra Pradesh.

Western India is perhaps the only region where the BJP can assume its chances to be safe. The rest of the nation is indeed a battleground. And it is in this battleground that the parties like DMK, MDMK, PMK, NCP, Lok Jan Shakti (Ram Vilas Paswan), TRS and BSP may throw all NDA's calculations to the wind.

In the event of the results throwing up a Parliament where the NDA does not have a significant lead over the halfway mark or possibly falls short, it is these very parties which will show a proclivity to move closer to the NDA. Barring the TRS and the NCP, all others have at some point in time allied with the BJP. The NCP too has not been totally averse to an understanding with the BJP. Since there is now a blanket ban on defections, the attempts would be to move parties or blocs of parties as a whole in favour or against the NDA. So do not be surprised if we have a G5 or a G7 in Parliament holding confabulation with both the BJP and the Congress. In the absence of a decisive wave in favour of the NDA, new formations at the Centre are likely.

Open contest, closed options

YOGENDRA YADAV

IN ways more than one, the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections mark a moment of closure in India's political history. These elections come at the end of a period of fluidity that characterized the first phase of the 'third electoral system' in India.¹ The reconfiguration of the party system witnessed in the last 15 years or so has come to a completion, at least for the time being. With these elections, the participatory upsurge of the socially marginalized appears to be reaching a point of saturation.

Election 2004 also marks the closure of a historical possibility that arose at the beginning of the 1990s, the possibility of competitive politics providing space for exercise of substantial choices by ordinary citizens. By now it is clear that the earlier system of Congress hegemony has been replaced by a system of multi-party convergence that does not meaningfully expand the range of choices available to and exercised by the citizens.² The democratic upsurge of

the 1990s has been contained and domesticated.

The Lok Sabha election of 2004 is thus simultaneously a closed and an open contest. It is an open race, for notwithstanding the media hype about a rising BJP and shining India, the final outcome leaves open a wide range of political possibilities for government formation in the 14th Lok Sabha. At the same time the race is a closed one, for the options available on the electoral menu and the range of expected consequences have shrunk significantly. The essay traces both these dimensions of the forthcoming election.

The first part places these elections in the larger context of the structural transformations in the arena of competitive politics in the last decade and a half to understand the historical closure mentioned above. The second part situates these elections in the more immediate context of the recent round of assembly elections and tries to anticipate the broad contours of the final verdict, so as to argue that the outcome is still an open question.

The demise of the Congress system in 1991 changed the structure of political competition and opened a range of radical possibilities in democratic politics. One dimension of this structural change was the emergence of state politics as the primary arena of political contestation. As states became the effective unit of political choice, it led to a differentiation of the trends and patterns in different states. Gone were the days of nation-wide electoral waves; now the national elections were no more than an aggre-

1. For an elaboration of this formulation and a discussion of the structural attributes of this phase, see Yogendra Yadav, 'Electoral politics in the time of change: India's third electoral system, 1989-99', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21-28 August, 1999, pp. 2393-9. An earlier version of the article appeared as 'The Third Electoral System', *Seminar* (480), August 1999.

2. Some of the points made in a short hand in the first part of this essay have been elaborated in Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, 'From hegemony to convergence: party system and electoral politics in the Indian states, 1952-2002', *Journal of Indian Institute of Political Economy* XV (1&2), January-June 2003. Many of the points made here originated in conversations with Professor Suhas Palshikar.

gation of state level verdicts. Widely misunderstood as the rise of disintegrative forces of regionalism, this change actually opened the possibility of bringing politics closer to people and of providing them with better alternatives at a time when national parties were not up to meeting local demands and aspirations.

The other dimension of the structural transformation in the early 1990s was a reconfiguration of the party system. The Congress system gave way to either a neat two-party competition or a multi-party system in different states. Suddenly there was not only space for new parties or for the old, but marginalized ones to gain new salience. The same development made formation of electoral alliances and post-poll coalitions both desirable and necessary. Viewed with suspicion as a sign of political fragmentation and unprincipled opportunism, this opening up of the political marketplace promised greater choices and newer opportunities to the ordinary consumer.

The high level of electoral volatility, leading to a very high incidence of the incumbent governments and representatives losing at the polls, seemed to confirm this reading. While many political analysts dismissed this as merely 'anti-incumbency', it was possible to read in these rejections a sign that the citizens were effectively and vigorously exercising their newly acquired choices. It held out the promise of making governments more accountable to the people.

These two structural changes were accompanied by two related shifts that served to underline the radical nature of the promise of the 1990s. The post-Congress polity was marked by a participatory upsurge of the lower classes and lower castes. Electoral politics witnessed higher participation

and more intense politicization of the hitherto marginalized groups, first OBCs and dalits and then women and adivasis.³ Initially noticed and scorned by the entrenched elite as a sign of the declining quality of the leaders and the idioms of politics, the second democratic upsurge had the potential of transforming the character of democracy by admitting new sets of demands as legitimate claims on the democratic enterprise.

The discursive shift that took place around 1990 deepened the promise implicit in the democratic upsurge. The sudden arrival of three 'M's (Arvind Das' memorable shorthand for Mandal, Mandir and Market) on the centrestage of Indian politics changed the political idiom and the nature of ideological contestation. Viewed as a sign of ideological impurity and decline by all the established ideologies, this development opened the possibility of shaping high politics according to peoples' need. A one-dimensional and thinly held left-right spectrum was replaced by real and intense contestations around three different dimensions of the idea of India; the three 'M's stood for three disputes about the competing visions of national political community. This ideological rupture also opened the possibility of issues like environment to be placed on the political agenda.

The radical promise of the 1990s may reach a historical closure by the

3. For a systematic examination of evidence on this, see 'Understanding the Second Democratic Upsurge: Trends of Bahujan Participation in Electoral Politics in the 1990s' in Francine R. Frankel, Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Bhargava and Balveer Arora eds., *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 120-145.

'Politics' in Marshall Bouton and Philip Oldenburgs eds. *India Briefing: A Transformative Fifty Years*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999, pp. 3-38.

time the 14th general election to Lok Sabha is held in a few weeks from now. A moment of closure is not necessarily a moment of negation or that of reversal. In many ways the processes that began in the 1990s have reached a point of completion. The two Lok Sabha elections held in rapid succession in 1998 and 1999 confirmed the emergence of states as effective units of political choice in a national election. The state assembly elections held since 1999 have demonstrated that the trends and patterns of state elections are independent of each other and of any presumed national wave.

Electoral volatility has completed a full circle as all the states except West Bengal and Bihar have witnessed a regime transition. In the last five years the process of reconfiguration of the party system was also completed. In this period Tamil Nadu, Goa and Assam joined the list of states where the party system has been fundamentally reconfigured, leaving Kerala as the only major state where the party system has remained unchanged since 1980. The democratic upsurge has spread downwards. If women's participation showed signs of matching the level of men's participation in the Lok Sabha elections of 1999, the latest round of assembly elections provide evidence of participatory upsurge among the adivasis, the only group that was left out till now.

The discursive shift of the 1990s has also reached a point of culmination, with every party coming to terms with the language of social justice, majoritarianism and economic liberalisation. If the first phase of the discursive shift was marked by intense partisan advocacy of one ideological dimension to the exclusion of others, the recent phase has completed the circle as parties begin to adopt platforms

that were not their own. In recent years, the BJP has advocated reservations in the private sector, the BSP has shifted to 'sarvajan samaj' and the CPI(M) and SP have flirted with economic liberalization.

The completion of each of these structural changes and related processes did not, however, realize the radical hopes attached with them. The changes in the structure of political competition opened greater number of options before the electorate without expanding or deepening the choice-set in terms of issues and policies available to the citizens. The last five years have confirmed a trend of convergence, a tendency for the major players in the party political arena to become like one another. This has led to the disappearance of issues with transformative potential from the political agenda.

Electoral volatility has undoubtedly brought in some measure of accountability, but has on balance led to routine oscillation rather than transformation. The groups that have managed to enter the political arena thanks to the democratic upsurge have been coopted by the existing political formations without undergoing radical internal transformation. The reconfiguration of party political space has not led to any relaxation of the entry barriers for the political movements struggling for social transformation. It is in this sense that the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections are being held at a moment of historical closure.

In this context, the narrow terms in which the electoral choice is cast comes as no surprise. For an election that could result in lasting effects, perhaps an irreversible damage, to the idea of India, the nature of political and ideological contestation appears to be remarkably narrow. This election is likely to be a contest between two

corporate political giants, both with similar products to sell, seeking to expand their market share. As in corporate battles, the greater the similarity in products, the greater is the effort to distinguish the brands, and more intense tends to be the competition. The intensity of electoral competition this time is likely to focus on the mechanics of electoral management, on strategies of alliance making, and on psychological warfare and media manipulation through the fine art of spin doctoring.

The one critical issue that does distinguish the Congress from the BJP, the place of religious minorities in India's future, is unlikely to be placed in the foreground by either of the two players. The BJP has already shifted the terms of the debate to its side and would be content to collect electoral dividends quietly, for it knows that a more strident posture at this juncture can be counter productive. The Congress knows that it is on the backfoot on this question in the absence of a policy or leader who can meet the BJP's challenge ideologically and is aware that a focus on this issue would work to its disadvantage. Thus in all likelihood these elections would be fought without any serious contestation about the only issue that makes these polls worthy of attention.

While moments of opening of historical possibilities often come with a bang, the moments of closure tend to be a quiet affair. The Lok Sabha election of 2004 is unlikely to cause a sense of world-turned-upside-down that one associates with 1977 or even 1967, the sheer surprise at the scale of the verdicts of 1980 or 1984, or the novelty of the pattern of 1996. In all probability we are looking at yet another routine verdict, where the element of suspense has to do with the

sum total of the state-wide verdicts and its implications for the various possible permutations of manufacturing a majority in the Lok Sabha.

If the suspense is intense, it is not because the range of possibilities is very wide; in fact it is precisely because the range of probable outcomes can be narrowly defined that the contest appears exciting. If the stakes are high, it is not because this election holds any promise for radical social change, but because a possible outcome may threaten some of the basics of democratic politics and endanger the very idea of India.

The outcome of the recent round of assembly elections needs to be interpreted in this larger context. Since the BJP and its spin doctors would like everyone to forget the larger context and see these elections as the foreshadow of the national elections, it is important to remind ourselves of what this verdict of the assembly elections is not.⁴ It is not, first of all, a sign of a nationwide wave in favour of the BJP. The BJP's victory in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh was much narrower than the number of seats might suggest. While it did win a comprehensive victory in Madhya Pradesh, it also faced a comprehensive defeat in Delhi, more sweeping than the number of seats would suggest. The defeat faced by Congress in two states out of three was small and is by no means irreversible. In any case, whatever the margin of victory and defeat in each state, it is not clear if that has much relevance for other states.

As we have noted above, the post-Congress polity is characterized

4. The following paras summarise the findings of a post-mortem of these verdicts with the help of post-poll surveys, first reported in a series of state specific articles by Yogendra Yadav and Sanjay Kumar in *The Hindu*, 8-12 December 2003.

by trends and pattern unique to each state. The verdict of the four Hindi speaking states is specific to the political circumstances of these states and may not apply outside. That these elections took place just before the Lok Sabha elections is no more than a coincidence of electoral cycles. These are by no means indicators of popular mood all over the country. The six monthly *India Today*-ORG MARG Mood of the Nation Poll had, in the middle of 2003, found that the NDA was well below the majority mark.⁵ It is not clear why the verdict of the subsequent round of assembly elections in a few states should be read as a reversal of public opinion trend in the country.

Similarly, there is no evidence of a saffron wave in this verdict. The BJP itself did not make Mandir an issue, except in some local context. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the issue generated no popular enthusiasm. The BJP leadership had learnt its lessons in the Himachal Pradesh elections in early 2003; they knew that Gujarat could not be repeated everywhere. Thus, even when a communally charged Bhojshala issue presented itself in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP did not make it into an election issue. Clearly, the elections were fought on routine local and developmental issues, and not on Hindutva.

If Digvijay Singh lost the elections, it was principally due to a perceived record of poor governance, especially in his second regime. It must also be clarified that all the Congress governments did not invite severe indictment on governance. Besides the obvious counter-example

of Delhi, the Congress government in Rajasthan also had a good reputation for its governance record and the Chhattisgarh governments' record on developmental work was not perceived to be bad. The electoral defeats do not necessarily imply an inability to govern.

And finally, these elections were not a positive verdict on the central government. The BJP leadership was at pains to point out till the day before the counting that these elections were not going to be a reflection on the central government. Survey evidence also suggests that ordinary voters did not see the election as being fought on the efficacy of the central government. These were very much state-specific verdicts, in line with the general tendency in the last decade or so of the ruling party's to fare poorly in the state assembly elections.

This is not to say that the verdict of the latest round of assembly elections is completely irrelevant to the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections or that these would have no consequences on the national battle. The consequences are here for everyone to see: the BJP has succeeded in creating a hype, has mustered the confidence to advance the election timing, and has succeeded in demoralizing the Congress in the first round of psychological and media war that is likely to dominate the Lok Sabha election. It is still not clear if these consequences would last more than a couple of weeks and would have any effect on ordinary voters.

In any case these assembly elections revealed something that can be critical for understanding the electoral prospects in the next Lok Sabha elections. These elections brought in sharp relief the complete mismatch between the organizational strength of the BJP and the Congress. The BJP has dis-

played an institutionalized will to power, while the Congress appeared like a house divided without any strategy. The Congress defeat in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh was a classic illustration of this weakness.

The BJP had a clear game plan, backed by considerable research and astute political management; the Congress had none. In both these states the level of popular dissatisfaction was not of an order that would indicate electoral defeat. A clear game plan, partial electoral alliances, better candidate selection or even a more coherent campaign could have won these two states for the Congress. The results also indicated that the Congress could not hold nerves in a closely fought contest. More than the fact of defeat, it is this that should worry the Congress leadership as it prepares for the national battle.

In the light of this medium run and short term context to the forthcoming elections, the arithmetic of the electoral horse race is easily summarized. While it is a gamble to forecast the precise outcome, it should not be very difficult to anticipate the broad outlines of the electoral verdict. Unless there is a sudden and radical reversal of some of the trends outlined above, we are looking at a fairly limited range of possible outcomes. The outer limit of this range can be easily defined in negative terms: one can rule out a clear majority for any single party. Like the five general elections preceding this one, election 2004 is going to produce a 'hung' Parliament.

The BJP accepted this reality long ago. One heard an occasional boast till last year that Mission 2004 would involve securing a majority for the BJP on its own. Such outrageous claims have been quietly buried now. The BJP managers know only too well that the BJP has improved and main-

5. See Ajit Kumar Jha, 'NDA on a slide', *India Today*, 25 August 2003. Oddly, the previous report of the same series in February 2003 had found a BJP wave based on fairly similar data.

tained its position through the 1990s by steadily contesting less and less seats to the Lok Sabha.

Beginning the decade by contesting 478 seats in the 1991 elections, the BJP has steadily ceded seats to newly acquired allies and contested only 339 seats in the 1999 elections. This time the figure is unlikely to be much different. This includes around 45 seats where the party is not a serious player, for it was not even the runner up here in 1999. A party that is a serious contender in less than 300 seats in a serious manner cannot possibly win 272 on its own, unless there is an electoral tornado working in its favour. That possibility can be safely ruled out.

The Congress has taken much longer to accept this ground reality and there are still Congressmen who entertain the grand illusion of the party securing a majority of its own. But the steps taken by the party after the defeat in the assembly elections reveal that the party is waking up to the real world of the post-Congress polity. The Congress contested more than 500 seats in the 1991 and the 1996 elections. The next two elections saw the party enter into some limited alliances and reducing the number of seats it contested to 477 and 453. If it is serious about forging a nation-wide anti-NDA coalition, the numbers are likely to drop significantly this time to around 375 seats. This will include the 330 seats where the party was either the winner or runner up last time. Once again, barring an electoral whirlwind, one can rule out the Congress coming anywhere close to a majority on its own.

Having set an outer limit, let us turn now to the more probable and realistic scenarios. Are we looking at the possibility of a clear majority for the NDA, if not for the BJP? The answer, according to a large section of the

media, is an emphatic yes. In doing so, the media may have unwittingly bought into the hype that the BJP spin doctors wish to create. There is no doubt that the BJP has made a smart move by advancing the poll timing by a few months. It avoids the uncertainties of a monsoon, increases the prospects of benefiting from a temporary improvement in macro-economic conditions, enables it to create a hype around its recent electoral success, and catch the Congress leadership off-guard. But is this relative advantage enough to allow the BJP to secure a majority of its own? Most sections of the media have not bothered to ask this question.

A hard look at the state-by-state scenario does not confirm this impression, for the numbers do not really favour the NDA. The NDA peaked in the 1999 elections when all the partners put together secured 310 seats. Since 1999, the BJP has not acquired a substantial ally who could make a difference to the electoral arithmetic. The results of the various assembly elections held since 1999 do not work in favour of the NDA.

The recent victories in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh do not indicate any addition to the BJP's tally, when translated into Lok Sabha seats. The BJP already holds 50 of the 73 seats in the Lok Sabha from the five states that went to polls in December 2003. If the voting pattern in these assembly elections were to be repeated in the next Lok Sabha polls, the BJP's tally would remain exactly at 50, as the gains in Madhya Pradesh would be offset by losses in Delhi. Prior to these assembly elections the BJP has experienced a string of electoral reversals including in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Taking all this into account, it is fair to say that the 310 seats the NDA won last time, or perhaps 300, is the

upper limit of what the NDA can expect to have in this election. But it is equally important to look at the lower end of the range, should things go wrong for the BJP and its allies in the crucial states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In that case, the NDA could go down as low as 220 seats. In other words, while a majority for the NDA cannot be ruled out, it is quite possible that NDA may fall substantially short of a majority. This election is still an open race.

For the Congress, its tally of 114 last time, the worst ever in terms of seats, defines the lower end of the realistic range for the party. Given the results of assembly elections since 1999, it is clear that the party is not going to fall further from the level it touched last time. It can only go up this time, and it has a lot of room there. If the Congress can turn the possible gains from Andhra, Haryana, Delhi and Orissa into a reality, the party's tally could go up to 175 or so.

Even this best-case scenario thus leaves the Congress about 100 seats short of the majority mark. Assuming that the Left would be willing to lend its 50 or so MPs, the Congress still needs to acquire and sustain a substantial support from its other possible allies. Currently it looks likely that the Congress will have a pre-poll alliance with the DMK and its partners in Tamil Nadu, NCP in Maharashtra, RJD in Bihar, BSP in Uttar Pradesh and perhaps in some neighbouring states. An alliance with SP looks improbable at this stage, while an understanding with the TRS in Telangana cannot be ruled out.

On this assumption, these pre-poll allies would bring anything between 50 to 75 seats to the Congress. Thus the range for the Congress and its various pre-poll allies is between 170 to 250 seats. Thus even in the best-

case scenario, the Congress is not going to be in a position to form a government with its pre-poll allies, without the support of the Left. In the worst-case scenario, it will fall considerably short of majority where the support of the Left would be of no consequence.

If this assessment is not wildly mistaken, election 2004 is still an open race. The BJP and its allies between 220 and 300 and the Congress and its allies anywhere between 170 to 250 may be a small range in statistical terms. This range of possible outcomes is narrower than the possible range in a national election during the period of wave elections. Yet, politically speaking, this opens up a wide range of possibilities. If the NDA crosses 250, ahead of the Congress-allies-Left combine, it is sure to manufacture a majority, ensuring another five years of what would be, for all practical purposes, a BJP rule at the centre.

The Congress and its pre-poll allies need to capture a minimum of 200 seats in order to be in the fray for the formation of the next government. If that happens, it again opens up several possibilities. If the Congress on its own has 150 seats or above, well within the range of possible outcomes, it will be in a position to drive the government formation. This would result in a Congress government supported from within or outside by its allies and the Left. Otherwise, the other allies and the Left will be in the driver's position, thus recreating the United Front scenario. The range of possible outcomes also suggests a third scenario, where both the NDA and the Congress-led coalition are short of a majority and the balance is held by others, mainly the SP. The arithmetic of government formation in that situation is anybody's guess.

Which of these possible scenarios becomes real would depend on how the battle is played out on the various regional battlegrounds. It is useful to see the forthcoming elections as comprising four fronts where four different battles will be fought (see table). The battle of the West (including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh) is likely to be tilted in favour of the BJP. With recent assembly election victories in these states and the possibility of Maharashtra going the BJP-Shiv Sena way, the BJP can virtually sweep this region. An alliance with the NCP may improve the Congress-NCP tally in Maharashtra. It needs to be remembered though that the BJP and its allies did very well in this region in 1999 as well and, therefore, do not have much to gain here.

Whatever the BJP gains on the western front may be lost on the eastern front. The BJP and its allies did exceptionally well in the East (Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal and Assam) in 1999. Now they have only reversed to look forward to in all of these states except Assam where the Congress did very well last time. The crucial states for the Congress here are Orissa and Jharkhand.

In the South too, the NDA had peaked last time and can only hope to control the damage this time. The critical states are Andhra and Tamil Nadu. The TDP-BJP victory in Andhra last time was based on a very thin margin; the Congress can reverse it and inflict serious damage on the NDA if it can handle the Telangana issue. In Tamil Nadu the DMK led alliance appears to have an initial advantage as it threatens to do to Jayalalitha what she did to the DMK in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The NDA managers have reason to worry here since electoral sweeps are not uncommon in this state.

In the North it is really Uttar Pradesh that can make a difference. Elsewhere it is slight advantage for the Congress: possible losses for the Congress in the Punjab may be made up and turned into net gains as a result of a better show in Haryana, Himachal and Delhi. In Uttar Pradesh, the last assembly elections had established the SP and the BSP as the main players. The BJP will have to come up with something special, more than just readmitting Kalyan Singh, to retain even the 25 seats that it won last time from the truncated Uttar Pradesh.

The Congress would have to depend on an ally. Here a BSP-Congress alliance has substantial rewards to offer both partners. If the Congress can substantially cut into the SP's Muslim support and the BSP maintains its base vote of 2002, this combine has potential of emerging as the largest bloc and causing a major political upset in the state. Incidentally, an alliance with the BSP has significant pay-offs for the Congress even outside Uttar Pradesh, especially in Madhya Pradesh and Punjab.

All in all, the BJP's game plan would be to improve its 1999 tally by about 20 seats in the West, retain what it had in the North and limit the damages in the East and the South to about 20 seats each, so as to cross the majority mark. The Congress, on the other hand, will plan to retain whatever it had in the West last time, gain 25 seats in the North (plus another 25 for its ally, the BSP), 20 each in the East and South (with additional 40-50 seats from its allies).

The final outcome within the range offered above would depend on how the electoral battle is fought in each of the battlegrounds representing different states. This is not the place to go into the specific factors that will

Lok Sabha Elections, 2004: Regional Battleground						
Zone/ State	Seats in Lok Sabha	Performance in Lok Sabha Elections 1999			Elections 2004: Best Case Scenario for Two Fronts	
		NDA	Cong- ress	Others	NDA	Congress & Allies
WEST						
Maharashtra	48	13 BJP 15 SS	10	6 NCP	Gains of 10 seats more for SS-BJP	Pre-poll alliance with NCP may help retain existing seats
Gujarat	26	20 BJP	6		Repeat of assembly poll performance: additional couple of seats	Retains existing seats, gains few seats from BJP
Rajasthan	25	16 BJP	9		Improve assembly poll performance; extra couple of seats	Retains existing seats
MP	29	21 BJP	8		Repeat of assembly poll performance: near clean sweep	Retains its seats in alliance with BSP
Chhattisgarh	11	8 BJP	3		Retains its seats	Split seats with BJP, in alliance with NCP/BSP
EAST						
Bihar	40	11 BJP 18 JD(U)	2	6 RJD	Keeps its losses below 5 seats	Major gains for RJD, some for Congress
Jharkhand	14	11 BJP	2	1 RJD	Losses contained to a couple of seats	Major gains for Congress
W. Bengal	42	8 TMC 2 BJP	3	29 LF	Losses contained to a couple of seats	Congress gains a couple of seats; LF gains 5 seats from TMC
Orissa	21	10 BJD 9 BJP	2		Losses contained to 5 seats or so	Gains 10 seats or more
Assam	14	2 BJP	10	1 CPML	Gains of 5 seats or more for BJP and AGP	Losses contained to a couple of seats
SOUTH						
AP	42	29 TDP 7 BJP	5		Contains losses to 5 seats or so	Gains of 15 seats or more in alliance with TRC/Left
Tamil Nadu	39	4 BJP	2	22 DMK+ 11 ADK+	ADMK allies with BJP, retains current tally	Rainbow coalition led by DMK sweeps the state
Karnataka	28	7 BJP	18	3 JD	A few additional seats for BJP; JD damages Congress	Retains or contains losses to a couple of seats
Kerala	20		11 UDF	9 LDF	No stakes here	Retains current level despite factionalism
NORTH						
UP	80	25	9	26 SP 14 BSP	Retains or contains losses to 5 seats or so; SP dominates the rest	Congress-BSP alliance gains 20 extra seats
Delhi	7	7	0		Splits seats with Congress	Congress sweeps as in assembly polls
Haryana	10	5 BJP 5 INLD	0		Contains losses to a couple of seats	Congress sweeps in alliance with HVP/BSP
Punjab	13	2 SAD 1 BJP	8		Major gains for SAD/BJP	Contains losses to a couple of seats
J&K	6	2 BJP	0	4 NC	BJP retains one; NC retains some	Congress upsets BJP; PDP defeats NC
All India	543	182 BJP 128 Allies	114		NDA crosses the majority mark with BJP around 170	Congress: 175 Allies: 75 Left: 50

determine the outcome in each state. But it is necessary to mention the different issues that will and will not come up during the forthcoming election campaign. This helps to understand the narrow agenda that is likely to dominate the elections.

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The BJP's strategy is quite obvious: the party will try to turn it into a presidential race between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi ('Atal ji versus a question mark') and exploit the carefully crafted and media managed image of the prime minister. Besides, it will try to wrong-foot the Congress on questions concerning Hindu sensibilities. Notwithstanding a lot of talk about the 'feel good' factor and 'India Shining', it is unlikely that the BJP's poll managers think that they have very much to sell about the performance of the Vajpayee government beyond some general hype. The strategy would be to create a *hawa* without getting into any substantial discussion of the government's performance in general and the economic policy in particular.

It is still unclear what the Congress strategy is, or indeed if Congress has any strategy, to counter the BJP's psychological warfare. The Congress has done little groundwork to be able to raise the issue of secularism in this election with any credibility. If it is serious about taking on the BJP it will have to find ways of focusing the campaign on the performance of the BJP government, especially on questions of impact of the economic policy on the poor and the level of corruption. Congress' inability to do so would only be seen as a sign of its internal weakness on these points.

As for other parties, it is unlikely that they would have much to contribute to the shaping of the debate, or that they would be capable of doing so even if they wish to. All in all, it is

quite clear that the election campaign would steer clear of the three contestations that dominated the public sphere and shaped political mobilization: the issue of social justice and dignity, the issue of pluralism and the future of Indian secularism, and the issue of the consequences of privatization, liberalization and globalization. Silence on these issues would not reflect a political resolution of these contestations, but a conscious attempt by both the leading parties to keep these issues under wraps.

It is a sign of the historical closure that the choice for citizens is restricted to an alliance led by the BJP and the possibility of another alliance led by the Congress. While the prospects of another five year stint for the BJP are frightening to many who cherish the idea of a plural India, the prospect of a Congress regime or another repetition of the United Front experience are not enticing either. A failed attempt by the non-NDA parties to provide an alternative to the BJP can in the long run consolidate the BJP as the natural party of governance. As the radical opportunities close and the polity returns to routines of bourgeois democracy, there is a danger that electoral verdicts can negate the gains of the last decade or so and impose regressive conclusions about the three main contestations of our time as a national consensus.

The possibility of a closure is also a reminder of the task for groups and forces outside the electoral contestations. If this moment of closure is the result of an inability of the political establishment to respond to historical opportunity and to popular urges and aspirations, the occasion calls for a concerted attempt to forge a new instrument of alternative politics. Those who watch the narrow 2004 horserace with fear and dismay may like to look for signs of an alternative kind of politics.

Books

**POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTIONS IN
INDIAN STATES: 1990-2003.** *Journal of Indian
School of Political Economy*, Volume 15(1&2),
January-June 2003.

THE story of Indian politics in the 1990s is still being written. But it is already possible to assign it two broad titles: the demise of the Congress system and birth of the post-Congress system; the deepening of democracy, or alternatively, its fragmentation.

The first title flags off a narrative that tracks the breakdown of Congress dominance and reconfiguring of the polity. The site is the states. Here, old caste and communal cleavages acquired a new political salience in the '90s and new faultlines were carved out. The story describes how the grand old party was transformed from a catch-all social coalition to an uncertain rump of left-over constituencies the others had failed to mobilise. It is a fascinating tale that runs the risk of lapsing into a bloodless account of electoral arithmetic. Most election studies of the '90s unresistingly succumb to this danger.

The second narrative makes an effort to evaluate the turbulence of the '90s by asking: Did the busy politics of the decade enrich the democratic project, or has it destabilised it? An increasingly domineering perspective promotes governmental stability as the essential hallmark of a political system. It frowns upon the

untidy proliferation of political actors. The implicit assumption is: the two party system as it obtains in the West is the ideal type and India's polity must replicate it. Till it does so, it must be seen as work-in-progress.

The alternative reading – of deepening democracy – is less derivative but in the end, equally undemanding, outlining a simple trajectory of an unmixed empowerment. There was a great churning and an opening of the political space in the '90s; sections of society that did not have a political voice earlier or were marginalised in the Congress system now have their own political parties, and are autonomous players now. No space is permitted in this sequence for interrogating these players' agendas.

In a special issue on 'Political Parties and Elections in Indian States: 1990-2003' of the *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, editors Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar also tell a story about the '90s. But their narration makes a series of significant departures from the stories so far. They situate the decade's tumult within the bigger picture of electoral politics in Indian states, 1952-2002. They insistently evaluate the '90s politics – but not for its fit, or lack of it, with received models. Nor is there any uncritical celebration of its peculiarities.

Yadav and Palshikar turn a questioning gaze on the starting point, the Congress system. Looking back, doesn't its feted 'catch-all' character look too natural

to be true? Are we missing the many subtle – and unsubtle – ways in which Congress ‘hegemony’ was constructed and maintained? The Congress system was surely propped up by a series of trade-offs. It was as much about exclusion as about inclusion.

Next, they systematically work out a new typology to categorise the various party systems that developed in different Indian states after the demise of the Congress system. Each system is plotted along two dimensions: one, the format of competition and two, the nature of political choice. What is the number of relevant political actors? Is the choice shallow or substantial – does it offer options that could make a real difference to the lives of citizens? Their conclusion is that India’s party system has moved towards a more competitive format – single-party dominance is the exception rather than the rule – but the choice set has not grown. It has, in fact, depleted. Politics in India has journeyed from ‘hegemony’ to ‘convergence’.

This is a provocative proposition: Is politics in India becoming more and more of a contest about less? They offer a reproachful and tremendously sobering answer. The democratic opportunities that opened up after the sudden collapse of Congress hegemony have all been tragically squandered. An intensified electoral political competition could have become an instrument of social transformation, but didn’t. Even as the contest has become vigorous, the choice of policy issues and agendas of governance has shrunk.

A ‘systemic drag’ is produced by the persisting structures of social and economic inequality. Even where a radical choice is born, it is soon in retreat. All competitors ultimately begin to resemble each other in a system that discourages polarisation. Smaller players do not stand much of a chance anyway in the first-past-the-post system. And crucial economic issues had long ago been airlifted out of the political menu in a joint operation mounted by the lead players:

But the choice also seeped out of the political contest in the ’90s due to an inability or unwillingness of the challengers of the Congress system to keep it alive. Content to spar on symbols, they have regularly failed the test of an alternative agenda. Mandal was eventually brought to heel because of the Mandalites, not despite them. The inability of leaders to come together on a common programme, to think larger and in the long term, contributed to their imprisonment within the boundaries of their respective states. Today, Mandal is not the tidal wave of social change it once promised to be. Yadav and Palshikar point out that Mandal was ‘fragmented, localized and thus contained.’

In the Yadav-Palshikar framework, then, the ’90s is the decade that hastened the paradox of spectacular social fragmentation combining with a dramatic policy convergence. As we stand on the cusp of another general election, political events seem to regularly reaffirm their thesis. Remember the friendly matches, just concluded between the Congress and BJP in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi, where the rivals roundly mimicked each other in their operative positions on all crucial issues. Look at the poverty of policy choices framed in multipolar Uttar Pradesh, where the SP and BSP lock horns most furiously over the renaming of districts. Please welcome the newly glamorous art of election management, and the snowballing demand for the Jaitley-Mahajan cookbook of backroom formulas to win elections. When political competition takes place around rival claims of doing the same thing better, the BJP-led front becomes the Congress-led front by another name. And most of the excitement of battle is to be found in party backrooms when it is not being generated by voyeuristic close-ups of the personalities in the race.

The chapters in the volume dealing with the different states contribute lingering images of political closure, providing evidence of the limits of political choice and the oscillatory nature of the vote. In Maharashtra, for instance, where the state-level leadership has continued to derive political support from the rural/agrarian communities while simultaneously catering only to the interests of the urban/industrial and service sectors, the dissonance carries on. In Haryana, where the term ‘party’ encodes two meanings – the established political party and the faction identified with an individual leader – and the voters identify more with the latter. Or the uncertain loyalties in Assam where parties are able to hectically eat into each other’s bases. As they outline the political contest in the ’90s in nine states – Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Uttar Pradesh these chapters as well as in the comprehensive statistical supplement at the end, we see a rigorous effort to present the data in politically meaningful classifications.

But in the end, this volume is most valuable for a conceptual frame that focuses insistently on the special burden of democracy in India. Unlike the West, universal adult franchise came to India when a large part of society was yet to be politically mobilised. In India, therefore, as Yadav and Palshikar point out, democratic politics has an extraordinary autonomy:

to activate, institute, or mask various kinds of social cleavages. As they insist, it also has a special responsibility to be the vehicle for social transformation, to reinvent the national community in terms that are inclusive, open and fair. To paraphrase Sunil Khilnani, the task of politics in India is to provide a safe house for conflicts to play out in non-destructive ways, and in ways that make politics rich and sustainable.

But for the abdication in the '90s, could things have happened differently? How can we sidestep the same closures in the future? The post-'90s question has been systematically articulated in this volume. In the concluding essay, Yadav and Palshikar urge that the onus to search for answers is on students of comparative politics. They must be provoked.

Vandita Mishra

KASHMIR: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace by
Sumantra Bose, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi,
2003.

'WHENEVER things threatened to fall apart during our negotiations – and they did on many occasions – we would stand back and remind ourselves that if negotiations broke down the outcome would be a bloodbath of unimaginable proportions, and that after the bloodbath we would have to sit down again and negotiate with each other. The thought always sobered us up and we persisted, despite many setbacks. You negotiate with your enemies, not your friends.'¹

The ongoing ethnic conflict based on the demand for what people of Kashmir call *azadi*, the right to self-determination, has 'come to present such a grave threat to South Asia's peace and to global security in the early twenty-first century.' For a discernable observer like Bose, any solution to the 'protracted confrontation' must take into consideration 'the sovereignty and territorial integrity concerns of the countries embroiled in the dispute,' besides 'the popular aspirations to self-rule as well as conflicting loyalties and allegiances within Jammu and Kashmir.'

A reading of the ever-burgeoning literature on the Kashmir conflict, including this significant work, enables us to identify some of these concerns and the possible solutions being contemplated. First the dominant concerns. For Pakistan, Kashmir has always remained an obsession. One can broadly refer to four factors to explain why Kashmir runs 'in the blood of Pakistan',

1. Nelson Mandela reflecting on the transition to a multiracial democracy in South Africa, 1997, quoted in the book.

as the political and military leadership never tires of saying. First, Kashmir has always been treated by a significant section of both the classes and masses in Pakistan as the 'unfinished agenda' of Partition. Second, the entrenched position of an oligarchy comprising of military, bureaucracy and politicians has led to a 'political economy of defence' in Pakistan. Kashmir provides the very basis of the legitimization to the idea of a militarized and increasingly authoritarian Pakistan torn by ethnic strife.

Third, the growing Islamization of Pakistan since the Zia regime has created a significant constituency of Islamist forces funded with oil money, not only among the masses but more importantly in the ruling stratum, including the military elite. For these forces a 'Muslim' Kashmir under a 'Hindu' India remains an anathema. Fourth, even among the moderates in Pakistan, the painful memory of Partition and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh serve as examples of excesses at the hands of the Indian state.

If Kashmir is the 'jugular vein' of Pakistan, then for India, besides being the 'shining example' as well as the 'litmus test' of Indian secularism, it is also the 'core' of Indian nationalism. Kashmir, 'a rose in the Indian bouquet' has come to symbolize the preservation of absolute, indivisible sovereignty and political integrity of the Indian state. Second, Kashmir also raises concern for India because of the heavy costs both in terms of loss of human lives and resources. From 1989 to 2002, between 40,000 (official Indian estimates) and 80,000 (claimed by the Hurriyat Conference, a coalition of pro-*azadi* and pro-Pakistan groups) civilians, Indian security personnel and insurgents died in the violence. The economic costs run into at least Rs 10,000 crore on an annual basis (directly for fighting the internal war and indirectly for manning the heights of Kargil and Siachen).

Third, it is increasingly being asserted by policy-makers that a peaceful solution to Kashmir problem would strengthen the idea of regional cooperation, thus charting a road map to greater investment and regional cooperation. Fourth, in the present world where democratization and celebration of identities and human rights have gone hand in hand with the processes of globalization, India struggles to present herself as the world's largest and most diverse democracy.

Let us now very briefly mention the ways being suggested by the 'Kashmir experts' and consider their feasibility in providing a 'strategic roadmap to peace' in the form of establishing the legitimate borders of political community. Most of these 'definitive solutions'

fall into one of the two broad categories, aptly described by Bose as plebiscitary or partitionist. The first route, supported by Pakistan and the pro-independence forces, is to settle the sovereignty question 'in accordance with the will of the people expressed through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite under the auspices of the United Nations.' India, however, rejects the plebiscite as irrelevant, obsolete and unnecessary, as the people of Jammu and Kashmir 'have exercised their democratic rights repeatedly.'

A second and third way can be in the form of India and Pakistan either granting independence to Jammu and Kashmir or India simply handing over the territory of Kashmir to Pakistan. Neither of these solutions are feasible. The independence option would be vehemently opposed by the classes and masses of both states whereas the later option would not find favour with both India as well as the pro-azadi segments in the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir. The emergent Hindutva cultural nationalists already warn that any 'second partition' would be disastrous for the world's second largest Muslim population that resides in India. A fourth option, mooted originally during the Simla talks in 1971, is to convert the existing 'line of control' into an international border. Growing religious fundamentalism and militarisation of civil society in Pakistan rules out this option even when India seems willing to consider it. In any case it does not address the sovereignty question within the contested territory.

A fifth option aimed at keeping peace on the *de facto* border and ensuring respect for human rights has been to revitalize the United Nations Military Observer Group, formed in the wake of the 1949 Karachi agreement and establish what the US based Council on Foreign Relations and Kashmir Study Group reports call a bilateral Joint Border Security Group. This option runs aground India's consistent stand to keep away from the UN, as there is a distinct recognition that involving the UN in Kashmir by Prime Minister Nehru was a blunder. A sixth and a more promising option can be to integrate non-Muslim dominated Jammu and Ladakh into India and share sovereignty over a united Valley with a soft border. The idea of softening the border is being pushed as a humanitarian initiative that would enable the divided families and villages to reaffirm their age old ties. This option can be worked out by mutual consent of both the countries, paving the way for a dialogue between ethnic (non-religious) communities across the Line of Actual Control.

But the pertinent question is whether it would be acceptable to Pakistan, and more importantly to the

pro-azadi segment of the population? What about the Islamist forces enjoying relative autonomy vis-à-vis the state in Pakistan? A seventh and the most 'dubious' of all solutions is to reorganize the state on the basis of religion, as demanded by diverse quarters such as RSS, KSG and the People's Initiative for Peace and Unity. The idea was originally advanced in Sir Owen Dixon's 1950 proposal of 'regional plebiscites'. These groups have been urging the GOI to create a separate Muslim state of Kashmir incorporating the Muslim dominated areas of Jammu regions like Doda and Poonch-Rajouri. The Hindu-dominated districts of Jammu and the Buddhist-dominated district of Leh are proposed as autonomous political units. Such a formulation only foregrounds religious identity and shows a disregard for the immense ethnic and linguistic variety in the state.

An eighth option, revived recently, and originally mooted during the talks between the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan in 1965, involves the Chenab replacing the existing line of actual control as the dividing line between India and Pakistan – the right bank of Chenab going to Pakistan and the left bank to India. Accepting this would mean that the entire Valley would go to Pakistan without taking into consideration the view of its political community. While referring to Kashmiri regional patriotism and aspirations to political self-rule based on a collective memory of historical subjugation and subsequent breach of contract by the Indian state, Bose observes that the pro-independence segment far outstrips the pro-Pakistan and pro-India segments.

Ninth, an 'outright' solution advocated by the ultra right in both countries, has been the building up of a decisive military superiority. Such a measure is discounted by strategic analysts primarily because of the nuclear power status of the two countries, incidentally among the biggest importers of arms in the world. The tenth relates to the mediatory role of the US, EU or UN on the pattern of the US role in Israel-Palestine and Ireland disputes or the roles of Norway and Japan in the case of Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka. The argument is that in a unipolar world the only powerful outsider in the region, the USA, 'cannot be denied regional access and the sooner Indian policy acknowledges what most other regions understood a long time ago, the better.'

Pertinently, the most intense involvement of third parties, i.e. USA and UK, in the search for a solution of the Kashmir issue took place in 1962-63 following the China-India war. It was a colossal failure. After that

India has consistently rejected the role of a third party over the Kashmir dispute despite such demand coming from Pakistan, as well as an increasingly concerned West still reliving the horror of September 11. As for track two and three diplomacy – advocating people to people contact or back-channel discussion entered into mostly by retired armed forces and government personnel, the intelligentsia and most recently by the parliamentarians of the two countries – it has not had any significant effect except for providing photo opportunities.

Even a cursory look at the above-mentioned concerns and possible solutions leads us to agree with Bose that the Kashmir conflict at its core is a ‘dispute over sovereignty... defined by the mutually reinforcing intersection of domestic and international sources.’ The two state-centred claims to sovereignty that are ‘maximalist’ in nature ensure the invisibility of the people of the Valley in the ongoing territorialized discourse on Kashmir. Keenly aware of ‘the entrenched positions and antagonisms’ that are complemented, and compounded, by ‘sharply different preferences on the sovereignty question within the contested territory,’ Bose, the pragmatist, makes a remarkable effort to outline a multidimensional framework for peace building that ‘acknowledges and accommodates all of the competing national (and quasi-national) identities and agendas, and negates and rejects none.’

Drawing lessons from his indepth studies of similar inter-state sovereignty disputes over territory in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bose suggests that the sovereignty and territorial integrity concerns of the two hostile neighbours must be respected, but so should ‘the popular aspirations to self-rule as well as conflicting loyalties and allegiances within Jammu and Kashmir.’ Drawing attention to the multiple meanings and a fluidity that associates the term *azadi* – from freedom to autonomy – Bose calls for foregrounding the ‘democratic rights to participation, representation, and self-government.’ Such a measure ensuring political dignity would be welcome to all the three segments in the state professing rival notions of national self-determination. With the two contending states agreeing to accommodate and compromise with ‘a subtly reframed, non-maximalist yet substantial meaning of *azadi*’, a honourable compromise between state power and popular aspirations to *azadi* can be reached, as for instance by granting substantial autonomy to both parts of Kashmir (as was the case in Indian part of Kashmir before 1953). Any such agreement should have the ratification of the parlia-

ments of both countries, as well as of any other relevant non-state actors’ bodies. Subsequently, it could also be put to popular referenda, conducted separately in the Indian and Pakistan parts of Kashmir. By insisting that such a peace building framework would not impinge upon the contending states to formally renounce their established positions and declaratory ideological stances, Bose shows his understanding of the inability of the two states ‘to transcend the sediments of history that are weighing them down’ and the fact that Kashmir has been transformed symbolically ‘into the cornerstone of the nationhood of both countries.’

The success of this meticulously researched book lies in revealing that it is the statist perception of ‘national interest’ and not the people of both parts of Jammu and Kashmir that invariably receives foremost attention in the security-centric ‘mainstream’ discourse on conflict in Kashmir. Recounting the tragic story of Kashmir from the perspective of the peoples of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, Bose reiterates that for realizing a ‘new architecture for the subcontinent’ there is critical need to develop a political culture in the two countries that can understand ‘that sometimes nationalism is the enemy of the national interest.’ For the purpose, Bose could very well have referred to the philosophical notion of *Kashmiriyat* which preaches a humanist and eclectic basis of community on the one hand and foregrounds the liberal and non-dogmatic attitude of the people towards religion, on the other.

Finally, Bose succeeds in making us recognize that the Kashmir ‘problem’ is more a problem between the peoples of both Indian and Pakistan parts of Kashmir asking for *azadi* and the contending states of India and Pakistan rather than merely between the latter two.

Ashutosh Kumar

THE AFTERMATH OF PARTITION IN SOUTH ASIA by Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya.
Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia,
Routledge, London, 2000.

THIS book seeks to establish the centrality of partition in the making of modern South Asia. Critical of writings which treat partition as a step to ultimate ‘nationhood’, the authors demonstrate that Partition in itself has contributed to a host of significant social, economic, developmental and political transformations. Transcending the boundaries of nation states, their treatment cuts across the standard debate in partition studies on its ‘high politics’ and ‘subaltern effects’. In

a contextualising and broad-ranging introduction, Kudaisya covers the writings of administrators, geographers, professional historians, literary figures and cinematographic forays into the events surrounding partition. The gradual opening up of new archival material, and research methodologies has enabled the democratisation of writing this history.

In ‘The enigma of arrival’ Kudaisya describes various celebrations of independence that were organised by political parties, church communities, students and volunteers in British India and the Princely states. This includes Savarkar’s call for a boycott of the independence day. The desires of Hindu supremacists for the prohibition of cow slaughter, for *devanagri* as the *lingua franca* and for India to be renamed Hindustan are countered, in some measure, by the voice of M.K. Gandhi. The anguish of religiously defined minorities in India and Pakistan is articulated. However, the meanings of independence are submerged in the detailed discussion of the rituals of independence.

Kudaisya finds it ‘extraordinary’ that in the protracted negotiations between the British, the Congress and the Muslim League, there was little debate on the issue of citizenship and the status of minorities in the new nations (75). It almost appears as if the debate on citizenship or the meanings of *swarajya* is sought at the *moment* of partition, a moment which was bereft of creative thinking. I submit that it is precisely this debate on citizenship and the rights of minorities, which had for its audiences the newspaper reading public of mofussil towns and large cities for the preceding two decades, that was rendered unfinished by the decision to partition. It was the inability to find a settlement to the problem of minorities, religiously defined, that has made partition the central *problematique* in post colonial South Asia. Kudaisya relates the dilemma of minority rights to partition violence with a refreshing insight:

‘Following the outbreak of large-scale disturbances in the Punjab the violence which erupted there and in other parts of the subcontinent was portrayed as “religious strife”, rather than as an assertion by the people of their right of residence, or an affirmation on their part of their natural citizenship to a land where they had been born or raised’ (75–76).

In a move distinctly different from recent offerings on the same period, Kudaisya does not linger on tedious descriptions of this violence.

The discussion on the Radcliffe Award opens with Auden’s famous poem: ‘Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission/ Having never set eyes

on this land he was called to partition/ Between two peoples fanatically at odds/ With their different diets and incompatible gods.’ The diets were mostly the same and the gods not always incompatible, but the leaders making territorial claims did indeed appear to be fanatically at odds in their perceptions of what was due to them. We learn that Jinnah had initially proposed a boundary commission of three impartial non-Indians to be appointed by the United Nations (83), which was unacceptable to the Secretary of State – who did not welcome international intervention – and to the Congress, which would brook no delays. Radcliffe, we are told, expected that his award would be negotiable and in the manner of an improvised boundary. Since he was also in charge of the Bengal Boundary Commission, he absented himself from all the sittings of the Punjab Boundary Commission that were held in the last ten days of July 1947.

The demands, counter-demands, positions and trade-offs by representatives of the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League and the Sikhs reveal the little weight of religious identity in the demands for greater and valuable territory. The effects of this rapidly drawn boundary were most immediately felt by the Sikhs who were split down the middle. Tai Yong Tan tracks the various alliances forged by the Sikhs with the Unionists, the Congress and the Muslim League in the 1940s, revealing the contingent and fluid nature of the Pakistan demand. The Sikhs’ post-partition predicament finds utterance in their demand for a Punjabi speaking *suba*. With some of their most important pilgrimage sites left in West Punjab, and an apparent denial of their political importance by their erstwhile supporters, the British, the Sikhs felt particularly short-changed in east Punjab. Here, the centrality of partition in the development of a ‘national’ consciousness among Sikhs is marked.

In economic development, too, partition has left a lasting imprint. The next chapter marks the path from displacement to development among refugees from the canal colonies of western Punjab, Sind and the North West Frontier Province. Relying on newspaper reports, Government of India publications and the writings of M.S. Randhawa, then Director General of Rehabilitation in East Punjab, Kudaisya shows that it required tenacity of purpose, imagination and sensitivity to fit refugees used to a different land, irrigation infrastructure and lifestyle into the relatively stifled conditions of East Punjab. Refugees from particular districts were shepherded into specific areas in east Punjab to avoid overcrowding in the border districts. Food loans, land

allotment schemes and the East Punjab Holdings Consolidation and Fragmentation Act of 1948 helped cater to the short and long term needs of villagers and effectively prepared the countryside for the Green Revolution of the 1960s.

The political will that shaped the rehabilitation process in east Punjab is thrown into sharper relief when juxtaposed against rehabilitation in east Bengal. The disdain with which several flows of refugees were treated through the 1950s is epitomised in the story of those banished to Dandakaranya, a mineral rich rocky region which includes part of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Here the refugees were compelled to subsist in pathetic conditions with little provision for drinking water, medical facilities or urban and semi-urban employment (156). Bengalis accustomed to fish culture, paddy cultivation and irrigated lands struggled in these 'dark forests'. They took to other kinds of employment where possible, many leaving in the 1960s and '70s. The Communist party, which depended on refugee interests for its electoral base, discouraged them from moving to Dandakaranya in the 1950s. But, once in government in 1978, it sent them back when they sought to return *en masse* to Calcutta. Kudaisya concludes with a discussion of 'ethnic' stereotyping: while it is commonplace to regard Punjabi refugees as enterprising and Bengalis as parochial, it is the bureaucratic and governmental attitude towards rehabilitation that is so at variance in the two states, leading to such different results.

Crossing the boundaries of nation states, Kudaisya tracks the fortunes of seven South Asian capital cities: Dhaka, Calcutta, Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, Chandigarh and Delhi. The growth and, in some cases, the very conception of these cities grew from the exigencies posed by the birth of a new nation state/states and the demographic changes imposed by refugee flows. The imprint of cultural, bureaucratic and military elites is felt in the making of these cities, in tandem with the post-partition histories of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The discussion of Karachi, in particular, reflects the changing social base of Pakistan's ruling elite and the fortunes of its Muhajirs. Lahore, on the other hand, is treated sketchily: the discussion of partition violence repeats well-known facts without elaborating on the social bases of violence.

In 'Punjab and the Making of Pakistan', Tai Yong Tan contends that the civil-military-bureaucratic combine created by the British in rural west Punjab to enable recruitment for the world wars was responsible for the very survival of Pakistan during the chaos

that accompanied partition. A convincing argument, it excludes, however, the influence of political parties organised along religious lines which sought to slice through the comfortable confluence of interests that held together the Unionist party in the late 1930s. This treatment thus glosses over the tensions created by *urban* interests in using the minority card to gain electoral weightage equivalent to that enjoyed by Muslim minorities in other provinces. Not germane to the viability of Pakistan as territorial state, the politics of Punjab's urban minorities is crucial to understanding the influence of 'Pakistan' as a conceivable idea and necessity. Urban considerations, I believe, did not always remain marginal to the politics of the Punjab (213).

The concluding chapter brings together several unresolved problems created by partition. Kashmir, the nuclear contest and arms race, water-sharing arrangements between India and Bangladesh, Sikhs and Sindhis in the South Asian diaspora, Muhajirs in Pakistan, Muslims in India, Biharis in Bangladesh and the peace initiatives between the people of India and Pakistan are discussed fleetingly. This chapter mirrors a difficulty with the overall organisation of the book. Although rich in detail on the consequences of partition, the book is not held together by an argument. This makes it a fascinating but fractured read. A fuller discussion of a single issue, like that of acquiring nuclear potential, or Kashmir, might suggest the extent to which the events of partition dulled the significance of *swaraj* with a subsequent emphasis on projecting a national identity marked by certain homogenous features, a quality of jingoism and exclusivity.

On the other hand, this discussion of the impact of partition at the economic, demographic and social planes across nation states is an important intervention in a field that seems increasingly trapped in a posture of victimhood vis-à-vis the community or the state. This movement across frontiers and the breadth of themes represented has necessitated an enormous amount of field work. End notes demonstrate meticulous research in Delhi, Lahore, London and less-visited record offices in Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Shahpur districts. In bringing partition to centrestage, the book suggests that it is partition and not the fact of independence that has transformed the lives of Punjabis, Bengalis, Kashmiris, Sindhis, Biharis and Indian Muslims.

Neeti Nair

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN INDIA: Modes, Motivations and Meanings edited by Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003.

CERTAIN issues become famous only after they become heavily politicized and newsworthy objects of interest. In India, the issue of conversion has frequently gained interest due to its politicization. Under such conditions, it is more the norm than exception that articles and research conducted on such issues is guided by political rather than academic interests.

In an era when the issue of conversion has been marked by heated exchange between different points of this multi-sided problematic, it is unusual to come across a truly academic work that pools together a large body of studies and researches, even if a little too historical. Most academicians would immediately try to find out the credentials of the authors for conducting such a work. Rowena Robinson did her Ph.D. on popular Catholicism in Goa while Sathianathan Clarke is a Christian theologian with Dalit concerns based in Tamil Nadu. In their introduction, they raise some crucial points about the relation between sociology and religion in India:

'Notions of sacred geography play a part in determining the relationship between specific caste communities and their locatedness/rootedness in the rural landscape' (p. 4);

'There needs to be much more analysis of the relationship between the legitimate social status that different communities are assigned through temple-based rituals and the manner in which conversion is utilized to subvert such socio-cultural conscriptions' (p. 4);

'There is a certain convention that governs various religious communities' social, economic and political clout in relation to the perceived status of these respective religions' (pp. 4-5); and

'There exist intricate frameworks that demonstrate the politicization of religious capital to valorize and devalue religious identities' (p. 5).

Given the above, there is a growing need to understand the process and reasons for conversion from the viewpoint of local areas and communities as well as from the point of view of individuals. It is this need that the book addresses.

The first section of the book deals with conversions to Islam. According to Robinson (p. 24) the 'procedural obligations to be fulfilled for acceptance into the new faith were quite minimal' to begin with. As a result many were led into conversions. It becomes

clear, through various examples, that forced conversions by Muslims were rare and did not form a part of a majority of the Muslim communities in India. The notion seems to have subsequently gained importance as a part of colonial mythology probably in response to growing Hindu fundamentalism (p. 29). There were, however, Muslim groups who advocated conversions, like the Nizari Ismaili model of conversion in South Asia described by Dominique-Sila Khan. Most religions survive 'by adapting themselves to various circumstances and contexts without losing their essence and forgetting their aims.' This shows the potential of religions towards universalization even within a particular system of beliefs and practices (p. 49).

In Kerala, a dynamic and egalitarian Islamic mercantile society interacted with an exceptionally conservative version of Hindu caste society (an older and Islamic version of liberation theology) according to the version given by Stephen F. Dale. He claims that a research methodology which goes into the details of locale, time, places and individuals can take concepts of conversion from the general to the local and the individual.

For Bengal, Richard Eaton shows how conquering Muslim rulers believed themselves to be superior to the locals, even punishing their own officials for forcibly converting the local populace. They grew by occupying newly untenanted areas and setting up mosques into newer-settled regions. Despite these barriers against conversion, the number of such converts to Islam grew in the same period. Yoginder Sikand shows how Arya Samaj proselytization (*shuddhi*) led to reaction from Muslims, including the formation of the Deendar Anjuman by Sayyed Siddiq Hussain in 1886 at Balumpet, Gurmatkal taluq, Gulbarga district, earlier a part of the Hyderabad Nizam's dominions.

The Arya Samaj campaign of shuddhi received a further boost after the Mappila revolt in 1921 when many Hindus were reportedly forced into converting to Islam. The numbers converted were, however, vastly exaggerated. Earlier Muslims kept a flexible border with others of different religions. However, growing antipathy and reconversion to Hinduism seems to have forced a better policing of religious boundaries and a deeper understanding was sought to be imparted to all Muslims so that they were not so easily tempted to reconvert. Sikand claims that this background explains the legacy of opposition and hatred between religions in India (p. 117).

The next section has papers relating to conversions to Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Paul Dundas

describes converts to Jainism in various parts of India in the early period. While discussing conversion of Raikas to Jainism, he makes no mention of the tribal religions, their relations with Hindus and other details. Further, the paper focuses more on processes than causes. Louis E. Fenech analyses the various forms of conversion of Sikhs over time and shows that the present concept of religious exclusivity did not exist in the past. Torkel Brekke sees conversions in Buddhism as a template to understand how people cope with religious change. He claims that once people become wanderers as the Buddha had become, they were more easily able to cope with conversions to Buddhism as well as conversions within Buddhism, from one sect to another. Many experienced no change in lifestyle. As a result, the concept of conversion itself seems to be inappropriate. Such conversions also depended upon individual volitions and charismatic leaders who provided the necessary impetus towards conversion. The final paper in this section by Gary Tartakov stresses the ‘typical’ nature of B.R. Ambedkar’s form of conversion to Buddhism and the Navayana Diksha as a kind of liberation theology with the idea of creating equality in society. This is highlighted by Ambedkar’s own systematic enumeration of the rules such converts should follow.

The next section deals with transformations of castes and tribes. Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube engage with the caste and sect transformations of the *satnamis* in Orissa and other versions of Mahima Dharma and Biswanath Baba. David Hardiman details the nature of conversion among the Bhils through Govind Bechar’s movement. A specific instance of the Bhagat movements among the Bhils, it was only later appropriated and depicted by Hindu nationalists as a freedom movement by the Bhils. Later Gandhians subverted this movement in order to convert animistic Bhils to Hinduism. The persecution of the sect was occasioned by a conflict with Brahmins and Rajputs of princely states. The movement was also feared as being insurrectionary by the British. However, the real difference between tribal animism and Hindu religion, though nebulous, is never properly explored by the author.

The last section deals with conversions to Christianity. Clarke details the two major functions of religion as being integrative ('offers to its adherents an orientation of meaning and framework for collective living') and creating a framework of resistance ('the subversive inclination of religion') for its converts. Further, a religion becomes enriched by the subjective

additions of local cultures within it. However, he stresses that the psychology of converts needs to be studied in more detail, a move that might please sociologists, anthropologists and theologians. This is exemplified through examples from Goa by Rowena Robinson, Tamil Nadu by Clarke, Punjab by John C.B. Webster and the North East Indian region by Frederick S. Downs.

According to Webster, such studies must be:

- a) convert-centred, studies of what converts hoped to become and what happened to them after conversion. Downs (p. 386) agrees when he argues that ‘it is from the perspective of the people, not the agents that acted upon them, that an understanding of the conversion movement must be found;’
- b) the context of conversion is crucial to understanding change and that the context is different in each case;
- c) the inward and outward process of conversion has to be studied. The outward process of religious practice, behaviour, relationships and socio-economic context are most often studied. The inward process is more difficult to capture; and
- d) it is a long-term process. The nature of the follow-up is to be noted. Generations may gain or lose its various aspects. Hence, a study of conversion through generations is crucial.

For those researching this area, the book is a historically ‘thick’ work marked by copious detail of theory, perspectives and techniques useful for further study. It also reminds the ordinary reader to go beyond newspaper articles and glib speeches and examine the reality of the situation, to go beyond the slick generalities of political speeches to the everyday life of religions over the years. Perhaps, this diversity will help in creating a better understanding than any other unitary approach. As Sathianathan Clarke comments:

‘Religions thus yield themselves to be discreetly and deliberately dismantled, relocated and reassembled. Religions are not finished products; they constantly hand themselves over to their adherents. They are susceptible to continuously being crafted into meaning-giving and meaning-making symbolic dwelling places. In this logical framework religious conversion can be posited as a community initiated attempt to create transmutations and transfigurations in its own God-world-human symbol system. Religious contours are redrawn without an explicit taking leave of one and entering into another unitary and organized religion’ (p. 217).

Abhik Ghosh

**GLOBALIZATION UNMASKED: Imperialism in
the 21st Century** by James Petras and Henry
Veltmeyer. Zed Books, London, 2002.

AS the authors aver, 'Globalization is at the centre of diverse intellectual and political agendas, raising crucial questions about what is widely considered to be the fundamental dynamic of our time – an epoch-defining set of changes that is radically transforming social and economic relations and institutions in the 21st century.'

Globalization is not global integration, turning the world in to what is often touted as a 'global village'. On the contrary, it represents an insidious 'usurpation' agenda for the global hegemony of the Master World led by the US. The recent Bush-Blair blitzkrieg in Iraq to disarm and destroy weapons of mass destruction of a nation, armless and defenceless by any international reckoning, by a reckless use of weapons of mass destruction stockpiled by these two countries is one horrendous manifestation of this fast unfolding 'usurpation' by the artful 'globalizers'. Underlying and integral to globalization are its artful charades and chicanery.

As both a description of widespread, epoch-defining developments and a prescription for action, it (globalization) has achieved a virtual hegemony and so is presented with an air of inevitability that disarms the imagination and prevents thought of and action towards a systemic alternative – towards another, more just social and economic order. The 'inevitability' of globalization is a critical concern. But a more critical issue, perhaps, is what the discourse on globalization is designed to hide and obfuscate: the form taken by imperialism in the current, increasingly worldwide capitalist system for organizing economic production and society.

The authors dismiss the above bogey of 'inevitability' – embedded in the burgeoning literature on globalization, especially from 'establishment economists', who have conjured up a seemingly fatalistic global agreement that *it just happened and everyone must adapt to it* – as part of yet another sinister imperialist agenda and lay bare with characteristic candour what the discourse on globalization is designed to obfuscate.

Of the eleven chapters of the book, the first three ('Globalization' or 'Imperialism'?; Globalization: A Critical Analysis; and Globalization as Ideology) are on the ideological dimensions of globalization. Together they expose the class project behind globalization, namely 'the attempt to obfuscate rather than accurately describe what is going on worldwide,' and

'the attempt to throw an ideological veil over the economic interests of an emerging class of trans-national capitalists.'

The authors argue that globalization is not a structural part of the capitalist system, it is instead an ideological smokescreen used to divert attention away from the resurgence of imperialist powers. Accordingly, they contend that globalization is little more than imperialism in a new form. Seeing it as an ideological tool used for prescription rather than accurate description, they contextually counterpose it with the term imperialism, which according to them has considerably greater descriptive value and explanatory power.

Using this concept, the network of institutions that define the structure of the new global economic system are viewed not in structural terms but as intentional and contingent, subject to the control of individuals who represent and seek to advance the interests of a new international capitalist class. This class is formed on the basis of institutions that include a complex of some 37,000 transnational corporations (TNCs), the operating units of global capitalism, the bearers of capital and technology and the major agents of the new imperial order. These TNCs are not the only organizational bases of this order, which also includes the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international financial institutions (IFIs) that constitute the self-styled 'international financial community' and 'the global financial network'.

In addition, the New Order is made up of a host of global strategic planning and policy forums such as the Group of Seven (G-7), the Trilateral Commission (TC), and the World Economic Forum (WEF); and the state apparatuses in countries at the centre of the system that have been restructured so as to serve and respond to the interests of global capital. All of these institutions form an integral part of the new imperialism – the new system of 'global governance'.

As the new class project is admittedly for creating conditions for the free play of greed, class interests and profit making, the action goes well beyond what the authors have termed 'renovation'. Nevertheless, they have brought out through an array of sources how this class project, especially its structural adjustment programmes, impacts on developed, developing, and the least developed countries.

How this project has been put into practice in Latin America, on the periphery of what has been termed the 'world capitalist system', is examined in chapter 4 (Capitalism at the Beginning of a New Millennium: Latin America and Euro-American

Imperialism) by focusing on the machinations of Euro-American imperialism at the beginning of the new millennium. Privatization is a key component of the neo-liberal programme of structural reforms and policies designed to create optimal conditions for global capital, freed from the restrictions and regulations under which it has been operating. Its role is examined at length in chapter 5 (The Labyrinth of Privatization).

The political dimension of neo-liberal capitalism and its imperialist project is examined in chapter 6 (Democracy and Capitalism: An Uneasy Relationship). Chapters 7 and 8 (Cooperation for Development, and NGOs in the Service of Imperialism) ‘focus on widespread efforts to give the structural adjustment (and globalization) process a social dimension and human face: a more equitable form of community-based and participatory “development” based on the decentralization of government, the strengthening of “civil society”, and the agency of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). At issue here are three modalities of economic development: (1) process insertion – electoral, globalization, modernization, development, etc. – by the state; (2) project implementation by NGOs, in partnership with central governments and international development and financial institutions; and (3) anti-systemic struggle by social movements.’ These chapters also review the dynamics of thought and practice associated with each of these alternative approaches and expose the hidden agenda behind the community-based and local forms of ‘participatory development’ that constitute the ‘new paradigm’ of development.

In this context, chapter 8 (NGOs in the Service of Imperialism) provides an incisive, important and interesting critique of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which are widely viewed today by the social (versus political) Left, as well as governments and proponents of ‘another development’, as the most appropriate and effective agency of economic change. As the authors argue, the agency of the NGOs reflects the World Bank’s ‘cooperation for development’ and partnership strategy, exposing thereby the local face of imperialism.

The brief conclusion of this chapter, ‘Towards a Theory of NGOs’ is particularly important in unmasking globalization: ‘In structural terms the proliferation of NGOs reflects the emergence of a new petit bourgeois as distinct from the ‘old’ shopkeepers, free professionals and the “new” public employee groups... Politically the NGOs fit into the new thinking of imperialist strategists. While the IMF, World Bank

and TNCs work with domestic elites at the top to pillage the economy, the NGOs engage in a complementary activity at the bottom, neutralizing and fragmenting the burgeoning discontent that results from the savaging of the economy... The NGOs have co-opted most of those who used to be the “free-floating” intellectuals who would abandon their class origins and join popular movements... The fundamental question is whether a new generation of organic intellectuals can emerge from these radical social movements, avoid the NGO temptation and become integral members of the next revolutionary wave.’

Chapters 9 and 10 (The US Empire and Narco-Capitalism, and The Practice of US Hegemony: Right-Wing Strategy) examine some of the complex political dynamics involved in the implementation of the globalization project. Once again, Latin America provides the context, illuminating a process that takes different forms in different parts of the world.

The concluding chapter (Socialism in an Age of Imperialism) provides a socialist perspective on the globalization project and the imperialist designs of capitalists in the U.S. and Europe. At issue here is the neo-liberal model of capitalist development and, across the threshold of a new millennium, the need to reconstruct a socialist alternative. The chapter also reviews possible conditions required for a socialist project in an age of imperialism.

The book is rich in scope and sweep and is perhaps one of a kind. The logically and thematically linked chapter titles and sub-titles themselves provide an overview of the book. Seen against the transmogrification of material and human resources development into a Frankenstein – which one can only hope will, true to the mythology, destroy its creator – this book, a powerful blast from the Left, merits great attention from all those who wish to see development with a human face. It is an active search for an alternative – a renewed, democratic, and revolutionary socialist vision that is capable of uniting people, and of being recognized by political movements that are committed to finding realistic strategies and achievable goals.

The authors, sociologists for a change, are last year’s winners (for this book) of the R.S. Kenny Prize for Marxist and Labour/Left Studies. Their book, as Noam Chomsky rightly observed, is a contribution of unusual value for those who hope not only to understand the world, but also to change it, drastically, for the better.

P. Radhakrishnan

SONIA: A Biography by Rasheed Kidwai. Penguin-Viking, New Delhi, 2003.

THE persona of Sonia Gandhi – as a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family, as a private citizen and as the leader of India's principal opposition party, the Congress – has evoked strong enquiries. Her provenance and what she represents has often been subject to vigorous political scrutiny. In the public mind her image has waxed and waned between a figure of mystery whose political motives have seldom been enunciated convincingly and a heroic maiden who stands between the forces of political and social radicalism and chauvinism and the future of India.

In such a milieu, any biography of an individual who has been described as 'a national obsession' merited a more thorough and less journalistic appraisal of her life and times. Sadly, Kidwai's book is unnecessarily anecdotal and represents the triumph of a mediocre journalism over a style befitting a subject like Sonia Gandhi. The resultant work is unable to connect reality with reputation or indeed make any valid distinction between posture and personality.

Writing in the *London Review of Books*, Patrick O'Brien described what must amount to a considered guide to biographical writing. 'The analysis of processes, institutions and the lasting achievements of significant individuals is what historians should be concerned with; and unless important outcomes can be attributed in large measure to the ideas and leadership exercised by prominent politicians, then their lives, however deeply researched and readable, contribute very little to our understanding of the history of government and politics.'

The problem with this particular work is that neither is it well-researched nor particularly readable. The '90s were, arguably, the most radical and volatile decade that Indian politics has witnessed. Juxtapositioning events and characters in this period requires a mastery over the details of the occurrences. Subsequently, the author should have been able to connect the various themes at play with the person under study. Yet the Rao years (1991-1996), which left a lasting impact on the Indian National Congress are despatched within 23 pages. Infuriatingly, for anyone concerned with a more serious assessment of Sonia Gandhi's political thinking and the internal political relationships within her party, the author has rarely attributed his quotations and information credibly. Thus we have to make do with attributions ranging from, 'Stated by those present on the occasion' to 'Based upon off the record conversation with those who were in the know and closely followed

the events then.' More forthcoming notes and less secrecy about his sources may have made this semi-biographical work both richer and more interesting.

The imagery in the book is clumsy and sometimes crude. To describe the Congress leadership as 'khadi clad, pan-chewing hangers-on' is no less trite than portraying Sonia Gandhi at the most crucial AICC meeting of her life as '...very much the headmistress at an assembly of spanked schoolboys.'

While the book exhibits painstaking research over the culinary details and aspects of dressage at the weddings of the Nehru-Gandhi family members, it focuses less on more politically loaded events. So, as attention is devoted to what was served at Sonia Gandhi's marriage ceremony and who wore what at her daughter's betrothal, the more politically valid sequence of events in the politics of Uttar Pradesh are described in the following manner:

'She kept playing musical chairs with the state Congress chief's post. First Prasada was removed and Tiwari was appointed. Then Salman Khurshid was appointed. Sri Prakash Jaiswal replaced Khurshid, but Sonia remained dissatisfied and brought in Arun Kumar Singh 'Munna', a little known political entity.'

Biography can reflect upon a life fully lived or meditate upon it episodically while it is lived. Kidwai's book reflects continually upon the prevailing meditations of others. He has picked up a broad canvas and speedily drawn upon it. Where rich colours were required we are left with a dullness of description even as a need for sobriety in some aspects has been perpetrated with sweeping flourishes. The work does not live it all but crawls along in prose. It sights the imprints that internal party politics of the Congress has made on the Indian polity as a whole but does not pursue them; as a result the author's judgements lack any reference to the rich political history of the Congress. When they do this judgement is flawed. For example it is simply wrong to state, without further qualification, that,

'...the composition of the Congress is such that the winner takes it all. The party has a tradition that there can be just one power centre. Till Nehru was alive, he was everything and the organization had to bow before him. During the Narasimha Rao regime too it became clear that he alone was in command.'

The wealth of information at the disposal of anyone writing about Sonia Gandhi should itself ensure that such an undertaking should be better structured, better researched and less hurried than this book evidently is.

Comment

THE forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in April/May 2004 are critical for the survival of the secular, democratic state of India because if Atal Bihari Vajpayee manages another term as prime minister, it will imply consolidation of power in the hands of the Sangh Parivar. Since the ideology of the Sangh Parivar is an open book, its victory in the elections may mean that plural democracy may formally and informally be replaced by the practitioners and believers of 'One nation, one culture, one people', i.e. – *Hindu Rashtra and Raj*. It is unlikely that the agenda of the Sangh Parivar can be implemented without Vajpayee as prime minister of India. Hence, the issue is: What is the political profile of our prime minister? Is he fully committed to the ideology of Hindutva? Or is he a liberal in the Nehruvian mould, a representative of the moderate and 'soft' tendency within the BJP?

A widely read weekly, *India Today*, brought out a special issue (12 January 2004) with the caption, 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee: The Great Unifier.' The *Hindustan Times* closed its last day of 2003 by declaring Vajpayee as the 'Man of the Year', clarifying that though every year such a choice was difficult, in 2003 Vajpayee was the undisputed and unchallenged winner. However, editorials represent the real attitude and opinions of newspapers. Under a caption, 'Lucky Atal: Jaswant's bonanza to PM's soaring stock', *The Times of India* of 10 January 2004 wrote, 'Is Atalji India's man of destiny, as the current chorus in the metropolitan media seems to suggest/or is he plain lucky.' The entire tone and tenor seeks to justify the 'financial adventurism' indulged by the Vajpayee government on the eve of the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Not to be left behind, the *Hindustan Times* on its front page declared 'Vajpayee – Man of Peace'.

Every prime minister of India – Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, P.V. Narasimha Rao – has been closely scrutinized by the media. Vajpayee represents the only exception. The Nehru-Rajendra Prasad differences of opinion were routinely highlighted to show to the public that a dominating prime minister was trying to reduce the President of the country to a cipher. Krishna Menon, a trusted colleague of Nehru, was a favourite whipping boy of the media, even as the poison arrow was directed against the prime minister himself. The media displayed its true colours when it hounded Nehru on his so-called disas-

trous China policy. Indira Gandhi too generally received a hostile press, ridiculed as a power hungry Queen Empress, in part because her own attitude towards the media was one of contempt.

The Rajiv Gandhi regime, in the inimitable words of the late Romesh Thapar, was dismissed as a *baba log* government. Subsequent 'investigative journalism' completely eroded Rajiv's 'political credibility' by highlighting his suspected personal involvement in the case of corruption relating to the purchase of the Bofors gun. He was defeated politically by the media which played on the sentiments of the people by projecting him as 'anti-national' because he sacrificed the interests of the defence forces. Even when General Sunderji repeatedly maintained that the Bofors gun was the best purchase for the Indian Army, the media drowned out his protestations by launching a direct attack on Rajiv Gandhi's political and financial integrity.

The upshot of all this is that the media has the power to convey a 'message' which can make or mar the political career of the highest functionary in a democracy. The irony is that the very same media which castigated Rajiv for promoting 'soft Hindutva' by using the government-owned television to show serials like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* has now adopted a policy of silence while commenting on the patriarch of the Sangh Parivar who is presiding over a creeping Hinduisation of the Indian state and civil society.

This despite the personal and political profile of Vajpayee. Vajpayee has not hidden that his association with RSS began in 1939 with attending the 'RSS shakha (assembly) in Gwalior. He completed his first year of the RSS organised officer's training camp (OTC) in 1941 when he was still in high school and listened to the addresses of Sangh leaders, including the founder Dr. K.B. Hedgewar. He completed this RSS training by attending two other camps in 1942 and 1944 and became a full-time worker of the RSS.' In the *Organiser*, Vajpayee writes that, 'When I was ill during the Emergency, my family members did not turn up to see me. They were afraid of being arrested. Only the RSS workers helped me.'

While visiting the RSS headquarters at Nagpur on 27 August 2000 he observed that, 'There should be no confusion over policies of *rashtra nirman* (nation-building). There are no fundamental differences between the RSS and BJP though views and opinions of

Whatever.

Whenever.

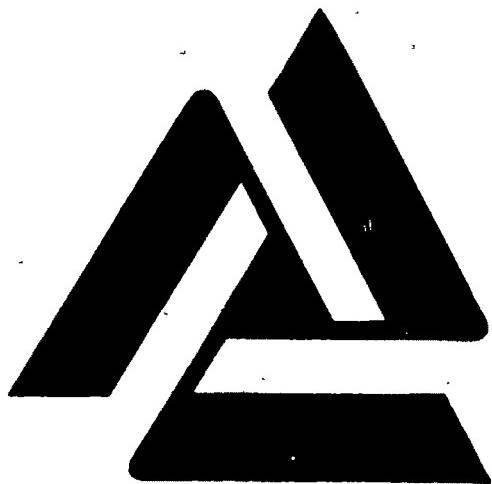
Wherever.

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individuals may differ.' He went on: 'I am prime minister today but may not remain tomorrow. But I was a swayamsevak yesterday and will remain one till my death.' Further that, 'I had the privilege of undergoing training under RSS founder, Dr. Hedgewar and former Chief Golwalkar.' Thus our prime minister is a self-confessed *pracharak* of the Sangh Parivar.

What is the explanation for the media build-up of Vajpayee? In 1998, the Sangh Parivar and the Vajpayee government began with a hostile attitude towards the 'pseudo-secular' media. No wonder they appointed eminent former editors to project a 'positive image' of the government because they felt that the media was controlled by the secular brigade who could not see anything good in the activities of a communal party government. Given that Vajpayee's life is an 'open book', how is it that he has become a 'darling' of the media – from 'villain' to a 'hero'? Is it that the media was tired of the high-handedness of the Indira government and corruption during the Rajiv and Rao phases of prime ministership? Hence it grew up, along with a large middle class intelligentsia, as a believer in 'anti-Congressism'. This hatred for the Congress has still to die out and the media continues to ridicule Congressmen as 'slaves of a dynasty'. Is it that the Vajpayee government is reaping the dividends of anti-Congressism of the media? Or is it that Vajpayee, in comparison to Sonia and leaders of other parties and groups, is perceived as a better performer?

A deeper analysis of the Vajpayee phenomenon in relation to Indian media reveals that an Indian intelligentsia used to dealing with 'open, democratic and centrist politics' of a faction-ridden Congress party has not developed the acumen to grapple with the complex politics of the Sangh Parivar. The print and audiovisual media had little reason to explore the deeper meaning of the policies and actions of the post-independence prime ministers of the Congress party as also of V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar, H.D. Deve Gowda and Inder Gujral. Politics was what was practiced by parties or factional leaders and so the media explained politics on the basis of public actions of the leaders.

Such an approach is inapplicable for understanding the real meaning of Vajpayee as prime minister. L.K. Advani has himself admitted that the 'soft' and 'hard' images of Vajpayee-Advani suits the party. A media obsessed with the prime ministerial acts of omission and commission has yet to come to terms with the Parivar. The Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal or Ram Janambhoomi enthusiasts are condemned by the media because they are perceived as 'bad boys' of the

Parivar whose government is led by a 'gentle' person. In this kind of analysis, Vajpayee continues to be characterized as a benevolent patriarch, mediating between the fanatics and the others.

In such a reading, the prime minister is not held responsible for Narendra Modi's record of governance from Godhra carnage to post-Godhra massacres or the continuing terrorisation of the minorities and dissident secularists in Gujarat. Evidently, Modi is not to be subsumed under the spurious argument of coalition *dharma*. Though Gujarat was in flames from March to June 2002, Atal Bihari defended Modi at the Goa conclave of the BJP in June 2002, disregarding those concerned with 'justice' for minorities in Gujarat. Modi won the state assembly elections by polarising Gujarati society. Far from distancing himself, our prime minister and home minister personally blessed the 'oath taking' ceremony of Modi. Worse was his statement that 'Muslims had not sufficiently condemned the attack on *kar sevaks* at Godhra.'

The media declares 'as man of the year' a person who distinguishes between citizens on the basis of their religion, and equates Lyngdoh and Modi when he says that 'constitutional authorities should maintain public decency.' A committed secular prime minister would have unambiguously condemned Narendra Modi who called 'Lyngdoh a Christian'. It was left to Chief Justice V.N. Khare to remind us that the 'riot victims in Gujarat could not expect justice from the Modi government.' Even as the judiciary and the National Human Rights Commission are defending our secular state, the gentle prime minister keeps silent, asking the media to accept Advani's statement that 'Gujarat was just an aberration.'

The media cannot have it both ways: highlight Mallika Sarabhai's persecution by the Modi government because she launched an attack on the murder and rape of the minorities and simultaneously absolve Vajpayee of the happenings in Gujarat. The media buildup of Vajpayee as a man of peace post his SAARC meeting collapsed when Colin Powell admitted that America had played an active role in bringing the two quarrelsome neighbours to the negotiating table. Either the media is wrong in its reading of the anti-Pakistan policies of the Parivar or Powell is right that the Vajpayee government, like Musharraf of Pakistan, was cajoled by the real superpower to sit around the table. The issue remains: Is Vajpayee a prime minister acting as a mediator or he is an integral part of the Parivar? We have to choose.

C.P. Bhambri

Essay

India and fiction

ENGLISH is certainly the language of colonialists. But so are Sanskrit, Persian, French, Portuguese and Computer. Ask any illiterate tribal or peasant. The history of India has been a long and chequered one of crossings and wanderings and conquest, by sea or water, by air or by ideas. Our vocation, as sociologists, disallows the possibility of engaging with fiction or speculation, unless they appear as collective representations. Indeed the debate around hierarchies and the complexities of language and dialects will always continue. Sociologists are generally wary of non-dualism, just as much as theologians. If everyone believed in the possibility of inclusion then many people, particularly theologians and empirical anthropologists, would be without a trade. Sociologists glean off the gatherings of diversity and resilience.

If English is seen merely as the language of power, uncontested power, then the reality of the Indian subcontinent would fail us completely. The truth is that English is alive and kicking inspite of boards painted by local painters which might leave one breathless by their spelling. The reasons for this are three.

English is a language of power because it has the power to mediate. It belongs to no one, so it can be used by all. There are hilarious confrontations recorded by our scribes, where Hindi *wallas* send letters in Hindi to Tamil *wallas* who reply back in Tamil. So often English intercedes as a third language. Further, it is a language which has colonized the world, so that American dictionaries exist in computer software, but American

is only a dialect of English like the pidgin spoken in many parts of the world. Emily Dickinson wrote in English, as did Henry James or Mark Twain, Poe and Melville and Thoreau. They were Americans writing English, a similar status which many of us in our country have – *Indians writing in English*. The language of state and statecraft are in the hands of those who rule.

When the French left India, or the Portuguese did, some small enclaves like Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Goa, Daman and Diu remained behind as symbols, museumising in time the urban, linguistic and culinary significations of a robust slice of history. Twenty years ago Raimundo Pannikar asked an audience in Delhi, 'If French colonialism had survived or Portuguese colonialism had, what are the ways their language and culture would have affected us?'

The accidents of history – premeditated sometimes, though that sounds like a malicious contradiction – left the British as a master race for four centuries. But what is interesting is that the resilience of the Indians has come from accepting the institutional regimes that were imposed upon them, whether by force, custom or consent, and actually continuing to carry on their lives as best as they can. This is a history of millennia and it is about a culture of poverty. Yet, would one accept the tenuousness of rule, if there is injustice. The Indians have made an art of *maya*, which allows them to imagine better worlds wherever they are. So English has survived, even with the poor, because it is the language of opportunity, it is the language of globalisation. The Malayali nurse, the UP *bhaiya*, the Baul singer... the list is endless. Who has not made it good in a globalised multicultural

*Continuing from *Vast Sargasso Sea*, published in *Seminar*, March 2003, written for Professor T.K. Oommen's festschrift. Paper presented at Administrative Staff College, JNU on 21 July 2003.

world with the rudimentary knowledge of the English language?

The second reason for the survival of English is that it is a language of commerce. This is independent of it being a colonizing, imperialist language of state machinery in its global interactions. Banking, trade and e-commerce have united the world in a form of capitalism that survives on hedonism. Advertisements have used the English language even in the most remote villages and obscure towns to sell what they have to. E-commerce means that spellings and grammar are not primary – a heart warming dyslexia has overtaken the world. Young people understand that visuality and orality are more compelling than grammar – the meaning is the message and the form is to spit at the erudite and literati. These are some of the grand gestures of modernity, not to be frowned upon in a ferment of rage over what constitutes the pure form.

Democracy is about the market place. The forum is still dominated by the young healthy and wealthy males, or older stable powerful established males, but it looks like the brevity of words and the simplicity of the message – power, money, sex – remains the uniform code. Women, when they push into the system, must either camouflage intention or behave like the boys. Ernest Hemingway, well known as a great hunter, always had a young healthy huntress travelling by his side. He was the boss and he wrote, she carried the guns and communicated that she could shoot. English as a language of sport (everything's CRICKET) or of business has made its compelling legitimacy known to the world. The colonial self-conscious sense of guilt about the past has recently been blown apart by their consuming support in ridding Iraq of its dictator as well as its natural and cultural wealth.

The third problem directly pertains to us, that of English as a literary language. Multinationalism implies that today people belong to many different worldviews simultaneously. It is impossible to belong anymore to a compartmentalized world. I am sure this has been the history of the world if not of groups or individuals for centuries. In 1930, after the collapse of the pepper trade with the West, following the First World War, my grandfather's business went awry. He was a man given to sharp and compulsive dealings, a self-made scholar of sorts. My grandmother told me when I was ten or twelve years old that grandfather had an English pen-friend, a woman who sent him books from England. Perhaps I had asked her where those blue and brown calf-leather, gold-embossed volumes of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Donne, Browning had come from.

In 1968 when my grandfather suffered a near fatal stroke – he would have been 80 or more – he returned home for a brief while prior to dying. Though hopelessly in a state of senile dementia, he recognized his family, was shaved and tonsured by his barber every day and would lie quietly in bed. Yet, whenever it began to rain he would get up, take a wicker shelf with a dozen or more English books and put them out in the rain. My grandmother, who would frequently check on him while he lay serenely on his rosewood couch watching the rain, would suddenly notice the English works of prose and poetry out in the verandah catching the rain. Then throwing a towel over her head she would rush out and drag them in. Was my grandfather saying something about Macaulay's shelf of English books? It was he who had made my sister and me sit next to him on the verandah while a woodpecker rapped a home for himself in the *thoon* or column of wood holding up our roof. We recited 'A lily of the day is fairer far in May' over and over again till we knew it well. I was eight years old when he taught me that verse, a grand gesture from a man who didn't like children over-much and was by nature strict and careful with time as he was with money.

Now while the debates go on about multinational companies, *bhasha* writers, awards, 'Rushdie's opinion' – I am very puzzled. A love for language, as rural or forest peoples singing songs to the seasons or to their gods or wives or crops, comes from the contexts of their life. A love for English or Sanskrit or Greek or Telugu comes from just such specifics of contexts. For me there was no reincarnational sense at age six when I thought of myself, 'I know when I use a word wrong in English. I just know.' It was my third language in early childhood, not as decreed by the state, but by the contexts of my upbringing. Malayalam was first, since my parents, my sister and my *ayah* (*chedathi* – or classificatory older sister) all spoke Malayalam at home. Hindi was equally significant and most loved because it was the mother tongue of most of my friends in the neighbourhood.

English was my third language learnt at school – a parrot language that went, 'Ann sing to mother.' And 'Mother sing to Ann,' 'Father comes home.' 'Ann sings to Father' for pages and pages with water cress, pianos and heaven knows what else. Was it divorced from my reality? Of course it was – but children are not skeptics, and we were as trusting of the English language text as we were of the Hindi language, one which said that Shastriji (who would be a revered prime minister extolling the *jawan* and the *kisan*, a very simple wonderful

man) had swum a river to reach his school. Children believe in the ‘other’ and the plausibility of many worlds. So I learnt the English language and in time it became the language of greatest significance. My paternal grandfather had an English pen-friend perhaps, but my maternal grandfather had learnt English as a young man at a missionary college in the latter part of the 19th century, travelling for 11 kilometres in a bullock cart every morning. He was a village school teacher who taught Malayalam to sixth formers as they were known then.

My point is that languages when alive cannot be hierarchised. Language and parole are conceptual tools – in reality the symbiosis between speech and grammar is as woven as tongue to palate. Distinctions only allow for greater interlacing and greater power. For users like me, English is a bhasha language, and I am a bhasha writer. Hierarchies of language, of dialect, of great and little tradition, are festoons of the state. The state feeds the chosen ones – trips abroad, feasting and awards – and when the money dries up no one is happy. Writers may or may not get money, but both radical and bourgeoisie writers are equally pleased when patronized. Writers never scoff at money. Why should they? It allows them to live, gives them the pleasures of autonomy and generosity. Yet, I am drawn to the idea that there are thousands of writers and singers of tales in all parts of our country who continue to write and sing, invent and perform, even when the resources of welfare or patronage fail them. Writers and storytellers do not choose to be poor, hungry, dying, miserable – but if they are forced into situations like these, they would still try to write.

English language writers rarely suffer abysmal poverty. What they fear is lack of press. It seems mandatory to be recognized (even notoriety as a bad writer seems alright) in order to be seen as a professional writer. These are self-created hierarchies and not as dangerous as state-crafted ones where the Indian writer of English language fiction is always a Diasporite. There is a tragedy to that stance. Success as a writer in English for the state comes from one’s distinction as an Indian writer domiciled in a foreign country. Conclaves invariably list NRI writers as the most significant contributors to literature in India. One can well understand the angst of bhasha writers. Yet, we know that most people do the work they do because it helps them make a living (pay the rent) or because it is a job and everyone must be employed according to their status or their family’s expectation, because they like the work that they do, or because they are forced to

engage in some gainful employment. Why must writers feel that they absolutely must achieve awards, distinctions, large sums of money, or feel that they’ve lost out? Most probably this feeling is an artificial hunger, induced by a globalised society. How could we hunger for coffee if coffee bushes hadn’t come our way, or tea, or vanilla bushes? Or chillies or tomatoes or potatoes or gulmohars or jacarandas? One could extend it to the horse and cow, I suppose, if it didn’t feel one was treading on some politically dangerous ground, like that of the Harappan horse. One should *Chipko Neem Azadraktha* and hope for the best.

I think the new preoccupation with being recognized is as new as television coverage and media attention. The masses of our people can’t read yet and don’t have the money to buy a newspaper for themselves. It is these shocking contrasts that make us what we are.

If we look at Amitava Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land*, some of these existential problems I have raised are dramatically and sociologically posed. Ghosh is confronted with the possibility that the subjects of his study are more curious about him than he could have imagined. Yet although they are ‘simple peasants’ they are amazingly perspicacious. They ask him a staccato of questions which leave him completely dumbfounded, and they ask these questions over and over again, centring around ‘the divinity of the cow among Hindus’ and ‘the cremation of the dead.’ What happens to this research scholar from a British university is the sudden realization there are categories of translation that have to take place when one tries to decipher a culture. His secular and now suddenly foregrounded Hindu identity, his understanding of language – English, Bengali, Egyptian – his cosmopolitanism, his return to the archives to decipher the relationship of Arab trade and commerce with the Malabar coast – all suddenly leap through print. It’s puzzling that the language of time asserts itself here – modernity and tradition, the past interfaces with the present in cunning ways. Would Arab traders in early medievalism use the western calendar while corresponding to one another to date their missives?

The curious thing about writing fiction is that historical veracity is never a focus. Why should it be? What is more centrally focused is that ideas should be paramount – new ways of thinking about the past and the present are demarcated. Nothing more is expected.

Susan Visvanathan

In memoriam

Ramakrishna Hegde 1926-2004

HAVING had a fairly enduring relationship with Ramakrishna Hegde over a long period of time, I consider it an opportune moment to write about him, the times he lived in and left his imprint on, and on the legacy he has left behind. It is an unusual legacy that the generation which has followed ought to savour and build on. There have been few politicians who have left a mark *as politicians*, a fact that has special relevance at a time when the very idea of politics generates growing dissonance and despair. When both the persona and the institutions of politics are increasingly becoming objects of negative predisposition, not just on the part of the intellectually disposed but in the mass of the people inhabiting the social and political terrain, Hegde's passing away has led to a widely felt sense of loss, producing in its wake not a little mourning, something that happens only among members of a family or a close-knit community.

Hegde lent to politics an aura of intimacy that was widely shared, something missing in the public arena of our time. Even the newspaper headings that announced his passing reflected this: a suave political personality, one with impeccable credentials, one that informed the ethical dimensions of political phenomena, all of which made him stand apart from the general mass of politicians and public figures.

Another characteristic that marked Hegde apart from the rest of public and political beings was the sheer charm and aesthetics of his very presence wherever he went. Hegde's was a most attractive presence in the public arena. His death is more than just having lost a suave being in an otherwise unethical and opportunistic profession. It goes deeper, representing something close to a moral assessment. The sense of loss felt on receiving the news of his death reflected a degree of intimacy with his very being among so many, rare to find in the public arena. This is a quality which few have been able to measure up to.

But Hegde's imprint on the time he lived in was not just through the dynamics of a key person, a leading personality in the political arena. Hegde also informed states of awareness among diverse beings and their engagement with the world around. There was not just Hegde the human being and political personality, there was also Hegde as a social phenomenon,

the Hegde that informed political consciousness among those who came in touch with him, or simply received diverse imprints of his versatile presence. Hence my point about the sheer aesthetics of the way he touched the whole aura and antennas of his time. This went all the way from those who worked closely with him and felt his presence, to the much broader sweep of that presence across diverse beings and institutional spaces, across personal bonds and identities that this created. This is what makes Hegde such a unique phenomenon in India's political history, at any rate the history our time.

It is to this whole interface of personal intimacies and institutional engagements, all of which left a Hegde-ian mark on the time he lived in, and the time he has left behind, that I wish to record my tribute. It is a tribute that is at once personal and political.

Rajni Kothari

Krishna Raj 1937-2004

HE was the last of the titans. For all those of us who came of age in the late 1960s-early '70s, critical of the lived experience of Indian state and society, but still retaining faith in the humanist, republican and non-sectarian values of the Constitution, the *Economic and Political Weekly* was essential reading. Alongside *Seminar*, then edited by Raj and Romesh Thapar, *Mainstream* by Nikhil Chakravarty, and *Frontier* by Samar Sen, the engaged commentary and scholarly discourse in these journals marked a high point of our activist-intellectual life. Without doubt, the EPW was the frontrunner in this enterprise.

Maintaining the high standards set by his predecessor, Sachin Chaudhuri, Krishna Raj presided over the fortunes of the EPW since 1968. Only someone tasked with the responsibility of bringing out small journals – with minimal staff, limited resources and negligible state and corporate support – can appreciate the enormity of the effort in appearing, week after week, with quality material on a wide range of issues. And to have done this for well nigh four decades without promising either attractive renumeration or mass readership is close to miraculous.

Krishna Raj was a quiet, an almost obsessively self-effacing individual. An alumni of the Delhi School of Economics, his wide reading and knowledge never ceased to amaze. Nevertheless, his scholarship sat lightly on him. Readers, in all likelihood, may be more familiar with his scholarly wife, Maitrayee Krishna Raj, particularly her contributions to the 'Review of Women Studies' which she helped initiate, than him. Unlike many of his contemporaries in journalism, he was scarcely seen outside the confines of his spartan office, rarely giving interviews and never appearing on television. Not even when the EPW faced charges of sedition. He also, (another rarity particularly among editors) never wrote signed articles in his own journal. And for someone with an amazing circle of friends and collaborators, he rarely spoke, preferring to listen rather than imposing/asserting his personal preferences.

Nevertheless, his signature was apparent in every page of the journal – the editorials, the short commentary pieces, book reviews, reflective essays and the scholarly 'special articles'. How he managed, day after day, to persuade an incredible range of contributors to deliver on every conceivable issue will remain a mystery. What is undeniable is that under his stewardship, the EPW became the vehicle of choice for anyone wanting to seriously communicate with the engaged scholarly community, in India and abroad, both within and across one's field of expertise.

Even as more specialised (and prestigious) journals floundered in the face of diminishing contributions and readership, the EPW invariably had a long waiting list with contributors, many waiting for well over a year to see themselves in print. All because each knew that this was the surest way to arrive on the Indian scholarly and intellectual scene (the lively debates on the mode of production and imperialism).

Even though the EPW lost some of its early left-wing sheen, particularly in the post-reform years, it never gave up on its liberal, secular, humanist and progressive orientation. It must be the only journal to have been at different stages 'attacked' by sections of both the liberal and left-wing intelligentsia, the former accusing it of becoming captive to a 'left' cabal and the latter, more recently, of advocating and providing space, including editorial space, to 'unorthodox' engagement with issues of globalisation and privatisation. The last in particular 'distressed' many from the orthodox Left who read the shifts as capitulation to the neo-liberal orthodoxy. Nevertheless, both sides saw it as a mark of privilege to feature in the Weekly.

In many ways, these episodic controversies reflect the catholicity of the journal and its editor. It is never easy to rework earlier, strongly held, positions, more so when every shift of policy and perspective is translated in personal terms. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the activist/scholarly space with personality overshadowing principle. To have steered the Weekly through these troubled times and more, to have opened it out to a range of new concerns and writers – from historiography to popular culture, gender, environmentalism, management and labour, to name a few – without sacrificing interest in political economy and sociology is an effort worthy of the deepest admiration.

A word about managerial acumen. Most small/activist journals remain cash strapped and insolvent, forcing the promoters to rely on 'questionable' sources of finance. In part this is because publishers/editors are more comfortable with ideas than resources. How Krishna Raj and the trustees of Sameeksha Trust placed the journal on a more secure financial footing, bringing in not only larger advertisement revenues but also generating surpluses through the EPW Research Foundation, would make for an excellent case study in business schools.

Finally, the ability to hold together a team, train younger colleagues in low-profile, rigorous and value-based journalism too is a rarity. In times when most enterprises lose out to higher profile and better paying ventures, the EPW has managed to retain loyalty of its staff and expand both circulation and readership. It remains an essential part of all libraries – universities and research institutions, banks and newspapers, even NGO enterprises. Probably, it is the only weekly, contributions to which are accepted as part of academic curriculum-vitae, even though the EPW is no refereed journal. No wonder, the sudden and untimely demise of Krishna Raj is still difficult to register.

For generations now, researchers and academics, as also those interested in a serious engagement with the country, have mined the EPW archives. Undoubtedly, Krishna Raj is 'impossible' to replace – as much as an editor, friend, colleague, mentor and well-wisher. The Weekly will survive, as it must, a testimony to the enduring legacy of the man and his labours. In helping it to retain its vitality, even more, attain a more enduring presence, we will have repaid some of what we owe Krishna Raj and his project. He passed away quietly, without fuss, 'much in keeping with his personality'. What he stood for should not be forgotten.

Harsh Sethi

Communication

THE recent assembly election in Delhi helps the Congress Party in ways other than a simple electoral victory for the party in one of 28 states and 7 union territories of our country. The election has certain lessons that the Congress Party must learn and can apply as we head into an epochal national election. The Delhi voter stands out as a particularly insightful proxy for the national voter across India. The behavioural and voting patterns of the Delhi voter, therefore, should be analysed and utilized more broadly for the purpose of the forthcoming national election.

Lesson 1: The single most important lesson is that the Indian voter, regardless of how literate or educated, behaves like a rational consumer and is fundamentally aware of his or her own best interest. The voter, therefore, must be treated like a discerning consumer. This can fundamentally change the focus away from electoral arithmetic based on religious, caste and regional lines that the Bhartiya Janata Party and other groups are seeking to exploit.

Lesson 2: There was no alchemy in what the BJP achieved in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. The public perception created and fuelled by the BJP that the BJP has concocted a magic election formula is a fallacy. Were this the case, the Delhi election result should have been entirely different. What the BJP has done in the political sphere is exactly what every sophisticated investment bank and strategy consulting firm would like their clients to believe true of them in the corporate world. Good politics is not rocket science. Neither is good investment banking. Both are hard work.

Lesson 3: Unemployment is perhaps the single most important election specific issue in India today. The BJP performance on this front has been abysmal. The Opposition will reap great dividends if they can satisfactorily make public opinion aware of this colossal BJP failure. With the unemployment rate as a metric, India is in deep trouble. No shine whatsoever.

Lesson 4: The mechanics of an election during the advance preparation stage are comprised of a great deal of ground level work which is both time-consuming and tedious. This includes ensuring that voter lists are in order and that vast numbers of voters

(some holding voter identity cards issued by the Election Commission) have not been ruthlessly struck off the electoral rolls. The large size of individual assembly/parliamentary constituencies in the Indian democratic system makes this endeavour a lengthy and cumbersome one. However, the potential benefits to be reaped from this are substantial. This is low hanging fruit that must be picked. Voters who do not need to be canvassed and simply would like to exercise their constitutional right to adult franchise can make a difference in election results.

Lesson 5: There is no dearth of local political workers or *karyakartas* in the Congress. However, there is a painful absence of guidance and training. This group of individuals is largely under-utilised and its energies can be far more meaningfully channelled. In addition, this is not by default an expensive or mercenary proposition. Motivation, morale boosting and faith in a vision or dream go a lot farther than a daily wage that can be earned by a political worker during the brief period of an election campaign.

Lesson 6: Elections in India are not merely a return on investment (ROI) calculation. The magnitude of a party's election spend does not determine the outcome of an election. The Congress must not be distracted by the BJP's effective yet notorious fund-raising skills.

Lesson 7: In the past, the Congress Party had done a disproportionately high share of dreaming for this country. Leaders, *karyakartas* and voters need to be constantly reminded of this. Public memory is not as short as the BJP may like to have the Congress Party believe. Rajiv Gandhi had the capacity to dream. He also believed in the need to articulate and communicate his Indian dream to enthuse and motivate the people. This formula has been hijacked and is being used with abandon but without acknowledgement by the BJP. The Congress must once again project a dream.

The Congress Party is emblematic of the best things in India. As a young Indian, it is an institution that gives me great hope for the future of the nation. All liberal Indians who aspire to maintain, preserve and promote a pluralistic, cosmopolitan, multifaceted, democratic society and polity must neither forget nor ignore this fact.

Kanishka Singh

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Backpage

IS it time, as Prime Minister Vajpayee pleaded in his recent visit to Gujarat, to 'forget the past' and 'ensure that the flame of hate is extinguished forever?' Coming, as this did, in the wake of the Gujarat High Court judgement on reopening the Zahira Sheikh case, wherein the learned judges were evidently more concerned about the 'sullied' reputation of their fraternity than ensuring 'justice' for the victims of Best Bakery, one is entitled to be a little skeptical.

For Vajpayee, currently basking in the 'feel good' feeling suffusing the country post his 'successful' visit to the SAARC summit in Islamabad and a resumption of the stalled dialogue with Pakistan, relegating Gujarat to the past is crucial. He may even feel that he has 'tempered' Narendra Modi, forcing him to focus on issues of development rather than further ghettoise the states' terrified minorities. But for those fearful about the terrible knocking that our country's 'plural and tolerant' ethos has taken, ever since the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation and the growing centrality of identity politics, not foregrounding issues of justice can hardly be read as good news.

Take the recent vandalising of the Bhandarkar Institute in Pune by activists of the Sambhaji Brigade protesting against an acknowledgement to the institute in a book written by James W. Laine on Shivaji. Subsequently, the publishers, Oxford University Press who had already withdrawn the book were forced to shut down their showroom in the city. It is worth remembering that this is the first time that a centre for learning widely regarded for its classical scholarship and valuable archives has been so targeted. It is ironic that 'followers' of Sambhaji, a great Sanskrit scholar, should in the process of 'upholding' the dignity of their icon, desecrate a painting of Saraswati, loot and destroy rare manuscripts and even deface texts on Shivaji.

Instead of unilaterally condemning this Bamiyan like act and arresting all those responsible, the state government under Congress-NCP rule has banned the book, a first for a scholarly monograph. Clearly it is not only the Shiv Sena and the BJP who fan the flames of intolerance and false pride but also those who claim to uphold the secular banner. It is symptomatic that the 'leader' of the Sambhaji Brigade, an employee of the PWD in Pune, is still at large, confident that his BJP MLA wife will ensure his safety.

Less attention has been given to the fact that Salman Rushdie, visiting Mumbai for the first time

since the banning of *Satanic Verses* and the Iranian *fatwa*, was threatened by a Muslim fringe group and had to leave the country. Nor can we forget that the Left Front controlled West Bengal assembly had earlier censured and passed a resolution against Khushwant Singh for characterizing Rabindranath Tagore as a 'minor' poet, marking another first in our history. More recently 'banned' Taslima Nasreen's autobiography. Clearly the way politics is evolving in our country, every fringe group feels emboldened to uphold 'sentiment' and 'hurt pride' and censure critical thought. The modes might vary – from a war of words to violence – but each such act of closure only wounds India as we knew it and would like it to be.

The growth of this tendency, more than any other act of omission and commission, represents the greatest failing of the Vajpayee led NDA regime. Episodic new year musings and hand-wringing over the failure of *rajdhama* are insufficient to rein in elements – both in government and outside, allies or opponents – from practising a politics of perpetual resentment. We are fast approaching a situation where no figure – religious or secular – whom someone elevates to the level of an icon will be amenable to scholarly scrutiny.

Without for a moment denying either the need for heroes and icons or 'pride' in one's culture and identity, no liberal order can sustain itself without confidence to lay itself open to internal and external examination, multiple narratives and explanations: To insist on a unique and true account is a sure sign of stultification and death. We need to evolve institutional modalities within which an exchange becomes possible. And fear of retaliation has no place in this framework.

If Vajpayee's 'India Shining' is to carry credibility, it is imperative that the claims go beyond forex reserves and monsoon-induced growth rates. Even more feeling good about the 'weaknesses' of one's opponents. It would be churlish to deny the progress towards external peace – though some of the rapprochement with Pakistan must be credited to nudging by the US and the changed international environment post 9/11. To simultaneously ensure internal peace, Vajpayee will have to focus attention on the working of his colleagues of the Sangh Parivar as also the HRD ministry under Murli Manohar Joshi, 'infamous' for its 'historical' and 'cultural' interventionism. Else we can look forward to fresh acts of vandalism.

Harsh Sethi

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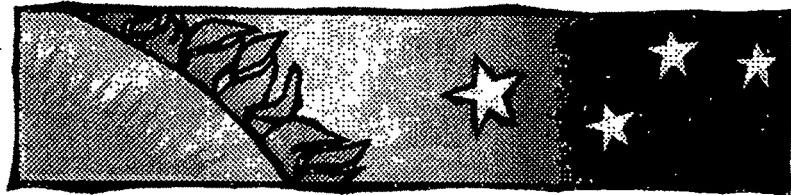
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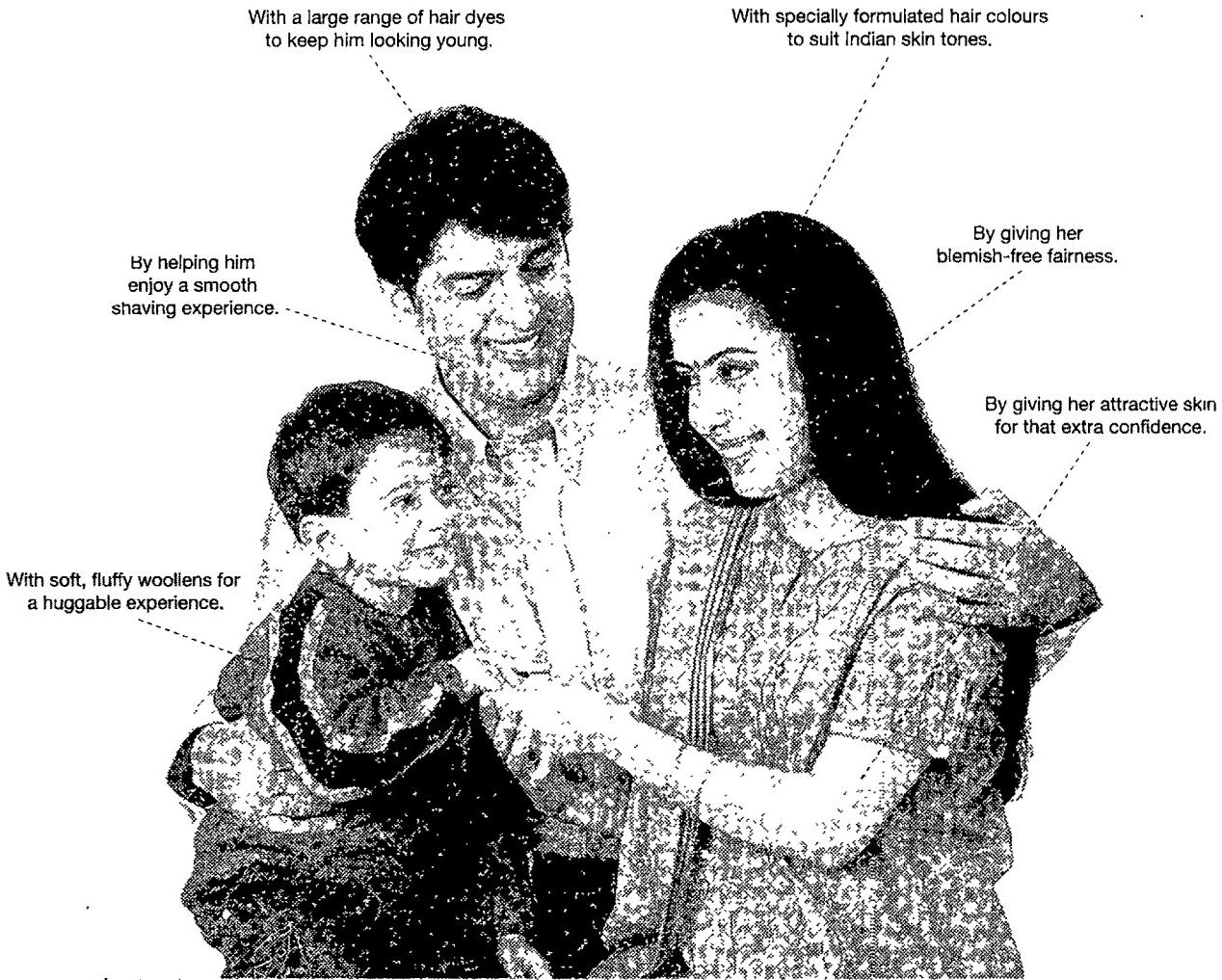
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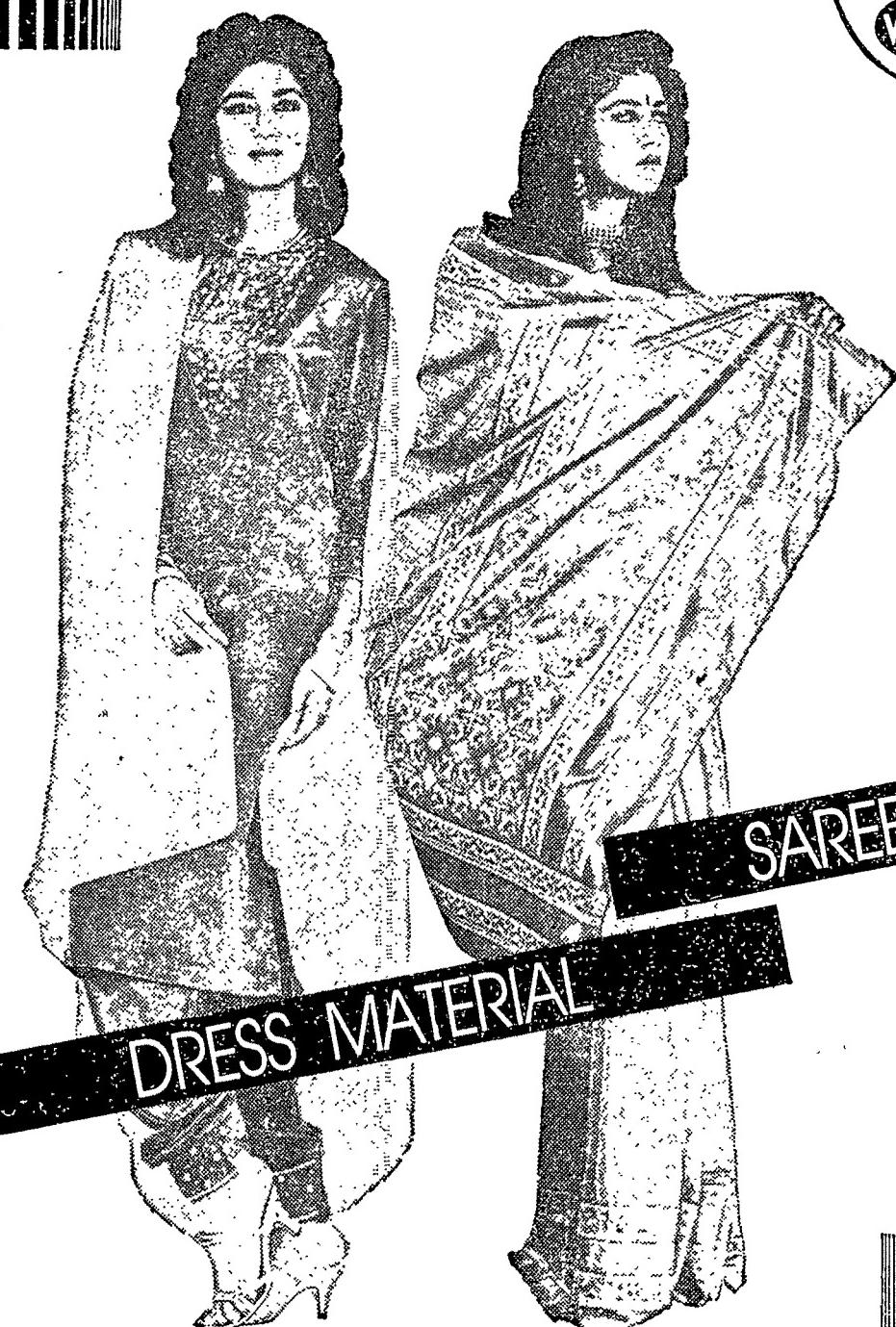
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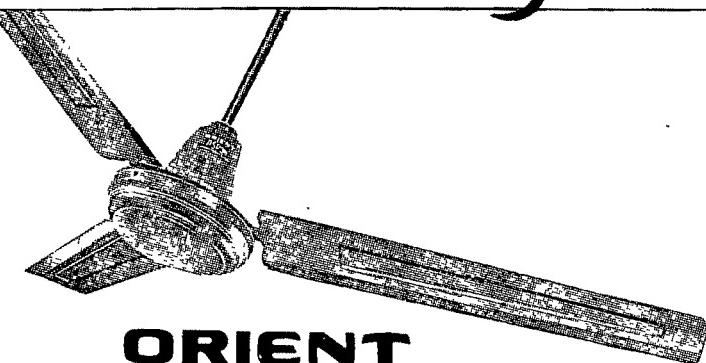


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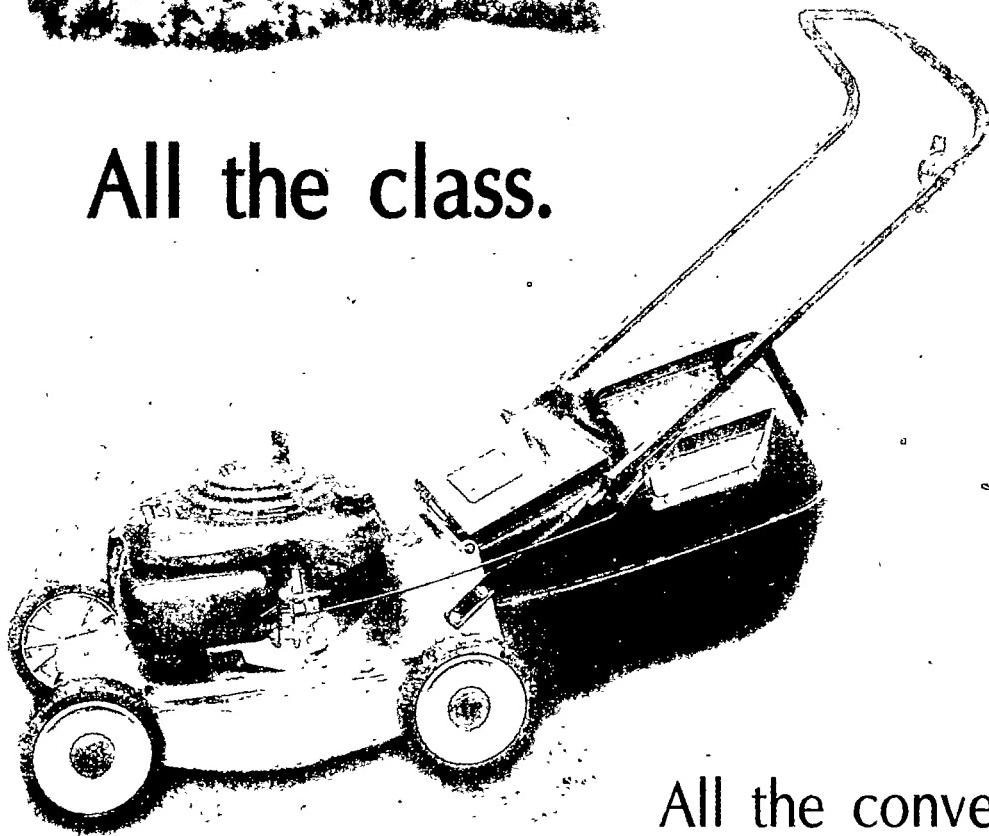
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The problem

IN contrast to our other metropolis', Madras/Chennai has most often been presented as an idyllic, genteel city, an example of 'simple living and high thinking'. If Delhi comes across as a court surrounded by villages, its soul corrupted by power, Mumbai as a worshipper of mammon and Kolkata as a city more marked by its past than present, Madras with its unhurried, almost sleepy pace, is seen as representing the continuity of Indian (read Hindu) cultural traditions.

True that the public culture of the North is rarely marked by grace, the Lakhnavi/Mughal *adas* notwithstanding. Our caste appears more casteist, our sectarian strife more intense, and our politicians just that much more crass and rapacious. The usual reference is to Bihar and U.P. Hardly surprising that most commentators believe that the Narmada represents the boundary between civilization and barbarism.

If the cultural difference is not to be traced to the erroneous 'racial' basis of Aryan and Dravidian, do we instead focus on the differential impact of Muslim rule? For many, South Indian culture has preserved, in a more pristine and pure form, the traditional Hindu ways of living. Even granting that such a proposition is implicitly 'communal' and does little to acknowledge the substantial Muslim (and Christian) presence in the states of the South (a common North Indian error), it cannot be denied that unlike the North, the Brahmin in the South enjoys a unique position, a far greater social importance and weight.

To the outsider, the South is Madras, not just the city but the idea—ritually defined, vegetarian and conservative, if not orthodox. Despite the fact that the more important temples—Madurai, Chidambaram, Tirupati, Guruvayur and Annamalai are not in Madras, and nor is it the seat of the Shankaracharya, the city, in popular imagination, represents the power of spirituality and faith.

Like all representations claiming to capture the essence, this one too is mistaken. Starting as the first English outpost on land negotiated from the local rulers, Madras-Chennai has grown into a sprawling metropolis afflicted by all the problems marking large urban agglomerations—overcrowding, decaying infrastructure, impersonality and, above all, a crippling water shortage. When a vast majority of the populace has little access to potable water and even the better-off are forced to rely on bottled water, tension is endemic. More surprising, however, is the fact that the shortages have, so far, not translated into severe water riots.

Much is made about the Madrasi's understated austerity, the absence of garishness in public and private buildings, how even the powerful and famous lead reticent lives, that a M.S. Subbulakshmi answers her own phone and the person next to you in the milk queue could well be a famous scientist. There is the amazing *katcheri* season which attracts hordes of music lovers, many young, and we have *The Hindu*, the one national newspaper still retaining space for serious articles. And of course, the fact that even the non-Hindu communities seem to effortlessly merge into the dominant public culture, the religious distinctions subsumed in a common cultural style. Of all our major cities, Chennai has been least disturbed by Hindu-Muslim conflict.

It is rare, in these accounts foregrounding temples and spirituality, devotional Carnatic music and Bharatnatyam, vegetarian food and Nalli sarees, love for scholarship (who can contest the fact of C. Rajagopalachari as our most erudite politician-statesman) and austerity, the Theosophical Society and Kalakshetra, to examine the role of the non-Brahmin, rationalist movement challenging Brahmin supremacy in public affairs and institutions on the city and the people. Or how an anti-caste movement over time consoli-

dates caste divisions such that we even have clear differences between Brahmin and non-Brahmin Tamil and the rise of caste/region specific political parties whose hold refuses to wither and whose shifting alliances make psephology a hazardous exercise.

Nor does this accommodate the inordinate influence of films and film personalities over politics, popular culture and discourse. Nowhere else can we see a shrine dedicated to MGR, with fur cap and dark glasses, or a temple with actress Khushboo as the presiding deity. And no other part of the country has witnessed suicides and ritual mutilation on news of the death of an Annadurai or MGR. The hold of fan clubs on politics and the frenzied adulation of stars cannot but affect civic culture. It thus causes little comment when politicians in power, in true filmy style, expend more energy to harass their rivals (though Punjab now seems to be making the grade) than ensure good governance.

A major enigma is the status of women. Like Mumbai and Kolkata and unlike Delhi, Chennai enjoys a well-deserved reputation for women's safety. A ride in the city's efficient bus system shows little sign of eve-teasing and seats reserved for women are never commandeered by men. But indices of domestic violence are high, and across class divides, demonstrating the gulf between public perception and private reality. The same remains true of Dalits who, despite the social justice plank of the Dravida movement, are subjected to endemic social exclusion and violence.

Old timers lament the passing away of the good old days – be it of Hindu greatness or British fair play. Madras, after all, was the first English outpost, the site of the initial experimentation with rules and regulations, libraries and archives, the municipal corporation, modern banking and even the Indian army. Even as the action shifted to Calcutta and Bombay and then Delhi, Madras retained its importance in national affairs –

from the founding of the Congress to Gandhiji's call for *swarajya*. It refused to be relegated to the outposts of the empire.

With all its continuities, Madras-Chennai today is a different city. The Brahmins may no longer dominate public affairs (this despite Chief Minister Jayalalithaa being an Iyengar), but they are crucial to the private sector. Having been forced out of their traditional environs and occupations by a combination of reservations and the non-Brahmin movement, they have become a pan-Indian, even global, community which retains an interest in the city, dominating industry and trade.

As it struggles to define a new identity for itself seeking to outgrow the traditional confines, partly as a result of pressure from the young, present Chennai now approximates any other large city. The tempo is undoubtedly faster as is the new importance to flash, display and consumer choice. Be it clothes, music, cuisine or nightlife – Chennai is no sleepy town, possibly no match for a Mumbai or Bangalore, but offering sufficient diversity.

There is also the grime and the decay, fraying infrastructure and an underlying edge of tension. Nevertheless, there is also the tradition of public service, be it the K.S. Sanjivi initiated Voluntary Health Scheme or the Shankar Netralaya which ensure quality health care at low cost for the less privileged. The state's rulers take justifiable pride in their mid-day meal scheme and primary health centres. And business, probably more than elsewhere, follows a code of ethics foregrounding substance over form.

Chennai-Madras is a complex, contradictory city experiencing the pangs of transformation. This issue of *Seminar* introduces the Queen of the Coromandel, the Gateway to the South, a city responsible for many innovations, which will hopefully extend its glorious past into the future.

First city of modern India

S. MUTHIAH

MADRAS that is Chennai, the Queen of the Coromandel, is a comparatively new city, less than 400 years old. During its first 150 years, however, it was the Gateway of India. Today, the first city of modern India is India's fourth largest and the Gateway to the South.

Over the centuries Nestorian merchants and Arab navigators, Greek philosophers and Roman centurions, 'Portugee' hidalgos and Dutch burghers, English East Indiaman and French musketeers, even Danish sailors and German scholars descended on Coromandel's ancient shores in search of diamonds and pearls, ivory and sandalwood, cordage and sails and, above all, the finest cottons in the world.

These were the riches of a great hinterland where for centuries ancient kingdoms had risen and fallen and risen again. To the South lay the maritime Pandya and Chola kingdoms, possessors of an amazing artistic legacy. To the West were the Pallavas, who had absorbed the skills of the Chalukyas and the Hoysalas and sculpted veritable open air museums. To the North were the last vestiges of Vijayanagar and the southernmost outposts of the Mughals. Their nayaks and nawabs added the final touches to the endless wealth of art, craft and skill that thrived in Coromandel's hinterland.

To Coromandel's shores, following the trade routes first navigated

... by the Arabs, then centuries later by the Portuguese and Dutch, the British came in the early 17th century. Seeking a permanent trading settlement and investment in a textile-producing area, Andrew Cogan, the chief agent of the East India Company at Machilipatnam, sent his Factor at Armagon near Nellore, Francis Day, scouting for a place where the Company, established on the first day of 1600, could find 'cloath better cheape'.

That he'd found it was what Day reported in July 1639, explaining too the land grant that his *dubash* Beri Thimappa had negotiated. England on that July day was richer by a strip of 'no man's sand' three miles long, one mile wide at its broadest, protected by the surf-wrecked waters of the Bay of Bengal on its east, an estuary in the south and a river to its west. All it needed was a thorn hedge to its north to protect it.

This would be England's main settlement on India's east coast, Cogan determined, and within a year he had established a factory, in effect a stockade enclosing a warehouse and a few homes. On 23 April 1640, St. George's Day, they grandiosely called it Fort St. George, the heart of what they named Madraspatnam after the neighbouring fishing villages that the Madra (Madeiros) family of San Thomé owned. To its north, along the bank of the west river, Thimappa settled weavers and dyers, bleachers and washers he had brought in from the land of the Telugus and they named their settlement Chennapatnam after the father of the Nayak whose largesse to the East India Company had given them a new home and the security of assured business.

Around the two towns, the Madras that is Chennai grew, taking in declining ancient settlements with histories more than 2000 years old.

The Company's Governor and his Council in Madras were, from the 1640s till 1772, in charge of all English East India Company settlements from Surat to Bantam in Java. It was no wonder, therefore, that the foundations of modern India were laid in Madras, which during this Age of Trade truly became the Gateway to India.

The rest of India may have long forgotten the contribution Madras has made over the years to the development of 'modern India'. Sadly, however, even its own citizens rarely remember their city's contribution to that India, and Madras remains not only a forgotten city but also a 'City of Neglect'.

In Fort St. George we have the genesis of many a facility that subsequently grew into a nation-wide system. It was here that Streynsham Master and William Langhorne and 'Pirate' Pitt who gave England two prime ministers, codified rules and regulations for the new settlement and introduced record-keeping – one strand that grew into red tape, and the other into archives. It was here, in the Church of St. Mary's in the Fort – the first church built by the British in India – that the country's first orphanage and western-style school were established; today, they have both grown and are thriving. St. George's School set the pattern for education, private as well as state-sponsored. Also, St. Mary's established a library that was to evolve into the present library system. And the banking facilities first established here went through various *avatars* before becoming the State Bank of India.

It was in this Fort that Governor Elihu Yale set up the first western-style hospital in India, primitive though it was. Outside its walls, he inaugurated the first municipal corporation in the country. The Survey School started

here was to grow into Guindy Engineering College, the oldest technical training institution outside of Europe. And it was here that the Indo-Saracenic architectural form was first introduced in the country.

Until Calcutta became the Company's headquarters in the late 18th century, Madras cast the seeds for much that has influenced India's present. It was here that Job Charnock was equipped for the mission that culminated in the founding of Calcutta; Stringer Lawrence lay the foundation of the Indian Army in Fort St. David and Fort St. George, Cuddalore and Madras with the Madras Regiment; Clive and that army played their part at Plassey; the first revolts against the British were in Madurai and Vellore by those from that army, and there was much more as the years rolled by.

There were no dreams of empire among these hardy traders, each intent on turning a quicker penny for himself rather than the Company and looking forward to going back 'Home' and settling down to the life of a 'Nabob'. The dreams of empire were initially those of Jean Francois Dupleix, who governed French Pondicherry, and his 'Begum' Jeanne. When he seized Fort St. George in 1746, it was to allow him a free hand to play the great game of protection that would help France bring local rulers to tribute-paying heel. When Fort St. George was rendered to the East India Company in 1749, the English demonstrated they had learnt their French lessons well. Over the next two decades, they ended the French dream and sowed the seeds of the Raj, having first prepared the ground during an Age of Expansionism that operated through the use of mercenaries.

With the French no longer a power in India by the 1760s, and the Mughals in decline, the English be-

came the dominant influence. With the Company's new army ensuring peace, the English moved out of forts to build homes and the symbols of the Establishment. In Madras, throughout the 18th century, such building took the form of the Regency, the Georgian and the Gothic – army engineers building in the styles they remembered from 'home' and the books of Roman and Greek architecture they pored over.

Their large airy public buildings, uniformly lime-washed a white that gleamed in the sun, were in striking contrast to the palaces and forts of the local princely orders. The homes of the new zamindari – prosperous British merchants and traders – followed the same architectural style, but surrounding themselves as they did with gardens around the houses and tree-rich 'parks' beyond, they made Madras famous for its 'garden houses'. Expansive living and extensive entertaining became the lifestyle of Madras in its second age – a sign of architectural things to come.

As forgotten today as Cogan, Day and Thimappa, not only in India but in Madras as well, is Chepauk Palace, built under the protective guns of Fort St. George as the home of the Nawabs of the Carnatic. Today, Indo-Saracenic is described as architectural form most favoured by the British, developed to depict their regal public face, and the princely order aped it to convey a similar impression. The high noon of this form of architecture was Lutyens' and Baker's New Delhi, though they fought shy of the term used to describe Mant's and Chisholm's, Irwin's and Jacob's masterpieces. Few remember that its beginnings were in the palace the first Nawab of the Carnatic, Mohamed Ali of Wallajah, wanted built in the Fort and then agreed to on a site across the river from its glacis.

He also accepted the services of Company engineer, later Company contractor; Paul Benfield to design and build the first British vision of a Hindu and Muslim architectural amalgam. The man responsible for the walls of the Fort and the town walls was an honest engineer who built to last, but he was also a shrewd exploiter of opportunity. And when the Nawab could not pay his bills, he continued to lead the hungry pack that had lent prodigiously to fuel Mohamed Ali's extravagances.

In the end, the scandal of the Carnatic Debts became one of the most heated debates in the House of Parliament before settlement was reached: the British government would settle on the debtor's behalf what it considered the legitimate claims of the creditors – and even those ran into millions of pounds (in the 18th century). In turn, it would accept the Carnatic – the Coromandel and its hinterland from Kanniakumari to the southern districts of Orissa – from the Nawab whose accession they had backed and for which they had fought the French in the Carnatic wars. The empire had begun.

With the fall of the Company and the dawn of the Age of Empire after 1857, the Queen of the Coromandel began to enjoy its finest hour, developing as a spacious and gracious city where commerce was not rushed and seemed civilized, and art and culture and the good life flourished. Late 19th century Madras was to contribute much to the India of today, while the 50 years till World War II were to change the city's own skyline.

It was men of the Madras Army like Colin Mackenzie, William Lambton and Francis Buchanan who were responsible for the opening up of India and discovering its wealth.

Mackenzie's land surveys, Indological obsession, Lambton's Great Trigonometrical Survey from Cape Comorin to Nagpur and which George Everest extended to the high Himalaya, and Dr Buchanan's findings of the immense wealth the land offered – all led to the creation of the Survey of India, the Archaeological Survey of India, the Zoological Survey of India and the Botanical Survey of India.

Charles Trevelyan's role in establishing the Indian Civil Service and his dialogues with brother-in-law Macaulay laid the foundations for the systems of education and jurisprudence that we are wedded to today. Thomas Munro's sustained advocacy for greater powers to Indians and much more are not just part of the record but form an integral part of everyday life in India. And in southern India, the opening up of land in its western reaches by men from Madras enabled the development of today's giant plantations that for a century were the driving economic force in this part of the country. These were some of the pioneering steps taken by men of the Madras Presidency.

In more recent times there have been other landmarks. The call for the formation of Congress was first given in Madras, as was the call for *satyagraha* made during Gandhiji's visit to the city. It was here that prohibition was first introduced. It was in Fort St. George that the Justice Party, the first non-Congress government in any part of India, took office. Later, when C.N. Annadurai led the DMK into the legislature in Fort St. George, it was the first time in independent India that a regional party had come into power. It was in Madras that we first heard the call for greater states' rights, which hopefully will one day lead to a reappraisal of the Constitu-

tion and a more equitable and federal form of central government. Here too was developed the country's first and biggest industrial estate. And no city in India has a bigger festive music season – or an older one – than Madras.

To serve British soldier and administrator, planter and trader and the investors and investments that kept growing, garden houses for the new settlers, some of the handsomest buildings for the houses of commerce, and palatial public buildings meant to awe with their Indo-Saracenic imperialist aspect were developed by architects and engineers like Robert Chisholm, Henry Irwin, John Goldingham and Norman Pogson, men who also pioneered a college of art, revival of old building methods, the training of engineers and the study of the stars.

The faded splendour of several of the buildings they raised still survives today – the garden houses and palaces of the Raj such as the Senate House, Presidency College, Guindy Engineering, the High Court and the Law College, the General Post Office and the Bank of Madras, the Museum and the Connemara Library, the Art Gallery and the Town Hall.

Perhaps the most significant part of the city, in contrast to other over-crowded areas, is George Town, the Indian settlement that was shifted from its original location north of the Fort to a planned, gridironed square of criss-crossing streets further north. What The City is to London, unprepossessive George Town is to Madras. Both the wholesale trade and the city's private wealth have thrived here from the middle of the 18th century. Both the Indians and the British working here made the Madras to the south of it what it was before World War II, a city of spaciousness and grace, a bastion of conservativeness and courtliness, a commercial centre where the pace of

wealth generation allowed for the leisure to enjoy the good life.

World War II changed all that. As the Japanese war machine rolled over East and Southeast Asia, the Allies were left with only two ports in Asia to serve their counter-offensive – Colombo and Madras. It was not merely the soldiers from Britain, North America and Africa and other parts of India who changed Madras. The 'war effort' transformed Madras turning it into a bustling industrial city instead of a quiet trading post that was also a charming laid-back capital. The demands of the war effort attracted thousands of job seekers from the hinterland of the Coromandel, making Madras a 'million' city before the end of the war, more than doubling its population in that fateful decade.

Post independence and Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of an industrialized India, the great trading houses of the Coromandel, which had semi-industrialized during the war, decided to become major industrial conglomerates. Newcomers joined the wartime immigrant population, adding to congestion and creating hovels and tenements. Then, with independence and time, the Presidency disintegrated into various linguistic states. Madras state became Tamil Nadu, but Madras remained its capital. The Queen of the Coromandel was, however, on its way to becoming a metropolis.

Maybe as befitting a metropolis, there is a little less graciousness and a little more rough-and-readiness. But where else in the country is faith greater and more obvious? Or where can you find a year-long cultural season that peaks in December-March with over 2000 concerts, at its climax offering four a day at around a dozen venues for 15 days? Indeed, faith and culture and an unsurpassed variety of southern cuisine, much of it vegetarian,

enable Madras to remain closer to a heritage that was ancient when Madras was born. That is the greatest charm of Madras that is Chennai, even as consumerism and 'westernization' take hold.

Indeed, the expressions of faith in Madras are not confined to the garb of pilgrims, the sectarian marks of the faithful or the sacred designs drawn daily in front of houses, big and small. It is most evident in the number of places of worship that abound in the city. Truly a city of a thousand shrines, there is scarcely a street in Madras that does not have its pavement shrine or a towering symbol of someone's faith. Ancient temples, many over ten centuries old, churches built by the Portuguese, the British and the Armenians, mosques where Sunnis and Shias have worshipped for centuries, even Jewish and Chinese cemeteries are all part of the fabric of Madras. Here people show a greater measure of mutual respect for each other's faith, while religion has developed side by side with a rich tradition of religious art and architecture.

In fact, this art and architecture and the crafts of the ages are what combined to inspire men like Benfield and Chisholm, Irwin and Pogson. What they created may, in terms of the Coromandel's historic past, be comparatively new, but without the skills of artisans who worked with lime and mortar, mud and rock, wood and metal, there would not be the buildings and the skyline that made the fort-centred town Day, Cogan and Thimappa founded, the Queen of the Coromandel. Its contribution to the India of today may be forgotten, its memorials to heritage may be under threat, but it remains a city of faith and culture where hope of a still better tomorrow is born afresh every time the sun rises and bathes the Coromandel in hues of fire and gold.

The Madras syndrome

TISHANI DOSHI

A kind of shirt—

*Madras: Loosely woven, fine cotton fabric.
Vegetable dyed in plaids, stripes and checks.
Tends to fade when washed.*

'Magical things happen to this shirt when you wash it.'

David Ogilvy

A CITY holds its name like its colour. Madras—Madras—Madras. It swims easily off the tongue. Means everything it says. Believes it can be India's most romantic city because of its pure potential. A port city capable of magic with the second longest strip of beach in the world. And what it can offer is this: the freedom to arrive, explore, drift, dream. A home for illustrious beginnings, meandering middles, infamous endings.

Take away its name and you take away the strings that hold the fabric together. Change its name without its consent and you may as well drown the shirt in hot water, wring it out to dry in the unforgiving sun, and forget all about it. The act in itself is tantamount to allowing a thing of great beauty to fade — allowing an ageing diva to succumb to nostalgia and sing about the good old days when the city had a name you could believe in — when it shone in bright, un-weakened colours, and was full of paradox and tradition and fullness. When it balanced the delicate art of revelling in understatement and tooting its own nadeswaram.

1996. Following the feisty footsteps of the Maharashtra government, the city of Madras is renamed so as to put the 'Tamil' back into Tamil Nadu. Madras, they claimed, was not a Tamil name. Why should a capital city be named after a random Portuguese trader, or worse still his wife, whichever version of the story you wish to believe? So, they searched for an alternative. Something more authentic. And this is what they came up with — Chennai. *Nai* — Tamil, for dog. Chennai, a kind of chinny dog. A clunky, ugly word that feels like salt on your teeth and sand in your throat. A heavy name that falls upon the city, choking all its claims to romanticism. A spanner that falls into the works at the crucial time of transformation, as the city hurtles toward the 50-years-after-independence and where-the-hell-are-we mark. A moment in history, where people have stopped to take notes. How much more traffic? How many more buildings? How many more people? Choked charm, inert canals, de-fragranced rivers. The second longest strip of beach — 13 km of now adulterated sand.

2003. Following the success of Kerala's tourist campaign, the state launches what it hopes will lift the mantle that has stifled the city. A brand spanking new banner — *Enchanting Tamil Nadu — Experience Yourself*, with Chennai, the capital, as the obvi-

ous epicentre. A Seven Point Action Plan which involves unlocking the hidden treasures of the state, positioning Chennai and Coimbatore as destinations for international conferences, as 'India's eastern gateway to the world.' Grabbing those global tourists (of which Madras receives fourth highest in all India), taking them by the hand to the new-improved, cleaned-up Mammallapuram (avatar of the previous Mahabalipuram) and onward to the purportedly plentiful, barely-breathed about gems scattered around the state, pocketing bits of euros and dollars along the way, and funnelling them back into the infrastructure. Severe repositioning. At least, that's the plan.

No mention of the fact that it was much easier to sell when people had a name they could identify with: Madras curry, Madras handkerchiefs, Madras filter coffee, Madras silks, Madras mallipu, Mylapore Mamis, Medical Missions, mridangams, MGR.

A name 350-years-old in the imagination. A name lighthouses have favoured as ships came in to shore. 1883, Joseph Conrad passes through on the 'Riversdale' and later joins the 'Narcissus' at Bombay (sorry, Mumbai), which later forms material for the novel, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. Later that same century, Jane Austen's spinster cousin, Philadelphia, passes through as part of the brood of 'good English women', proceeds to have an affair with Warren Hastings, produces a daughter, returns to England and marries Jane's brother. None of this material is apparent in any of Ms. Austen's novels. 1878, the mystical Madam Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott pass through to set up the headquarters of the Madras Theosophical Society. Early 1900s, 40-year-old George Sydney Arundale arrives to head Annie Besant's school

of Theosophy, falls in love with the then 16-year-old Rukmani Nilakanta Sastri (later, Rukmani Devi Arundale, later, 'Atthai'), marries her despite opposition, stands back to watch the unfolding of an exquisite dancer. 1930s, Somerset Maugham passes through Madras, moves on to Thiruvannamalai (the name stands) to meet Ramana Maharishi who becomes the 'holy man' in *The Razor's Edge*.

A city of illustrious beginnings; birthplace of famous babies who later found other homes – William Makepeace Thackeray, Arnold George Dorsey (later renamed Engelbert Humperdink, in an effort to kick-start his singing career), former England cricket captain, Nasser Hussain. A breeding ground for scientists, mathematicians, physicists of good Tam-Bram stock, and others (John Henry Whitehead). A city of firsts – site of the East India Company's first settlement, place where the apostle Thomas first stepped, from where Christianity spread its wings, first place in the world where payments were made for undergoing a vasectomy (Rs 30 a pop).

A city of meandering middles. Artists, philosophers, yoga gurus, dancers, singers, musicians. Jiddu Krishnamurti fleeting in and out, giving talks under the famous banyan tree. The mathematical genius, Ramanujan, who sailed away to England to work on algebra of inequalities, elliptic functions, continued fractions, partial sums and products of hypergeometric series, but came back to Madras to die of tuberculosis. R.K. Narayan, chronicler of small-town life in South India, making its subtleties available to the world.

Infamous endings: Rajiv Gandhi.

A city, in other words, of incredible comings and goings, but fallible, nonetheless. Because here's the

unearthed fact – Chennappa Naicker, Rajah of Chandragiri, who granted the British the right to trade on the coast, the major inspiration for the city's new name, turned out to have faulty origins. Turns out he was a Telugu speaker from Andhra Pradesh. Close, but not close enough.

I still like the alternative theory to the Portuguese coinage – that the city was named after a local fisherman, Madarasan. Improbable, but Tamil enough, romantic at least, and in keeping with the image of the city.

Here's an image of the city. Madras after monsoon rains wears its skies like a Kanchivaram sari: brilliant red, pink, purple, alchemised with those exalted elements of carbon emission, dust, debris, and omnipresent humidity, to create sunscapes of world calibre. A good place to catch one of the few uninterrupted views of the sky in the city is the Adyar Bridge. After crossing it, you can only catch glimpses of orange shards between the towering political cutouts, billboards and buildings. But December in Madras is a magical time. The trees are greener, early morning walkers semi-surface in their monkey caps and shawls, young people saunter about in jeans and long-sleeves without breaking into sweat. Even the cows and dogs want to leave their usual shady spots and congregate in the middle of the eternally dug-up roads.

This year, unfortunately, the rains duped us. She teased, taunted, lifted up her silken skirts, skittered about and left the entire state of Tamil Nadu in a dire state of emergency. Despite a massive rainwater harvesting campaign spearheaded by the Metrowater Board, the failure of the North East monsoon has forced water storage levels to an all time low and has created an uneasy sense of violence born of craving. For a city

bordered by the sea, famed for its 'placid and silvery Cooum' (granted, this particular epithet hasn't been true for a while now), these haunting images of water queues, and brightly coloured abandoned plastic water pots, seems surreal, unnatural.

But the problem of water is very real. A recent article in the *Indian Express* quoted the minimum water demand for the city at 180 million litres of water per day for domestic consumption. Now, the amount of hankering involved in the buying, selling, distributing and procuring of these precious litres from the water tankers – the new monsters of the road, who have well-surpassed the PTC buses, is a dangerous affair. By the end of November this year, there had been 120 accidents in Madras involving water tankers (both government and private), 30 deaths and 111 injuries. And these were just road-related accidents!

Even as I write, the death toll continues. An accident reported in this morning's *Hindu* (December 26), described the gruesome crushing to death of a woman and her son by a water tanker, minutes after attending Christmas Mass. Then, take into account the aggression involved off the roads. People are losing lives and body parts (Mr P.K. Palani lost an eye to local thugs who had taken over water distribution in his street), in an effort to exercise their basic rights to available, clean, drinking water.

At the end of it all, there is the same resonance. No groundwater recharge, alternate day water supplies, dwindling reservoirs, salinity, increased water tariffs, serpentine queues. The same sad stories the residents of the city have been living with for years. Except, suddenly, we are on the brink. This was the make or break year. Everyone seems to be talking wells, bores, suppliers, harvesting,

neighbourhood villages as alternative water sources (in complete violation of the Water Requirements Act 2002). Looking skyward, asking the prophetic question, *what will we do next year?* Buy gallons of mineral water and bathe our babies in it like the fearful expatriate wives?

Somehow, there seems to be a perpetuation of faith: the idea that *something* will happen. A depression in the bay, a rip in the sky, water tankers that will suddenly behave. Or even more miraculous, a sudden materialization of the chief minister's cross-border visit to negotiate the release of Krishna water. There's an incredible amount of belief.

Meanwhile, the state government has taken over water supply of a different kind.

In November this year, the government-owned Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) took over the wholesale distribution of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL). This involved putting 8,500 private owners out of business. The government justified this move, saying that it wanted to eliminate the sale of contraband and spurious liquor. This, in the only state which has licensed wine shops but not bars. Now, however, that rule has been relaxed, and liquor shops are allowed to serve the odd peg here and there. A subsequent chain of deaths related to drinking dodgy moonshine has followed.

Perhaps now is the time for retrograde. It being the end of the year and all, with the auspicious Tamil month of *Thai* approaching. January is a time for promises, hopes, wiping clean the slates, an ebb and tide kind of month. The month for marriages. It's an auspicious time. It's also the month of the harvest festival, Pongal, which is celebrated with great fervour throughout the state. Kolams, pujas, mass cook-

ing, new clothes, decorated cows, an inexplicable exodus to the beach (on all manner of transportation), are part of the festivities, but there's also *Bhoghi*, which involves taking out all the old, rubbishy things from our houses and burning them on the sides of the streets. A paradoxical event that symbolizes the cleansing out, purging, or uncluttering of our lives, but in actuality, de-cleanses, poisons, and clutters up the air with all kinds of toxic fumes.

Nevertheless, this is where we return to our frayed shirts and threadbare sheets. To the Madras syndrome. To David Ogilvy's brilliant advertising gimmick – the shirt that's guaranteed to fade, the Madras checks, the untapped magic. As a city, it has the same special qualities of the simple checked shirt lying in your cupboard. It's what you reach for when you have nothing else to wear; it's what you return to over and over for its blissful familiarity. It's comfortable, doesn't overpower, isn't glossy, allows you to retreat or stand in the light. It's real. And as we approach this time of bringing out all the achievements of the year to see if they sparkle, it's easy to hold a sense of disgruntled disillusion. To complain that this shirt has had either too much or too little washing, water, or wear. It's easy to turn into a group of snivelling, self-pitying sods, the only ones in the whole country forced to mope about in front of our non-set-top-box-enhanced televisions to watch news 24X7 or Tamil film songs.

But still, it breathes, allows you to *be*. Still, it has the capacity to welcome, to startle. These are new days ahead of us – not of sprawling houses and coy girls in *pattu pavades* and ribboned double plaits. These are days of burgeoning Bollywood stars, coffee pubs, and call centres. Great romances can still be born here.

A politics of retribution

MUKUND PADMANABHAN

AN Ooty boarding school is the last place that would familiarize anyone with Tamil Nadu's politics. Although mine liked to regard itself as 'alternative', in many ways it was a typical sort of place. We learnt to eat brussel sprouts and rhubarb, rode mid-horses in the downs and spent our fortnightly 'Tuck' money on stickjaws and marzipan in the town bakery.

I doubt whether our motley bunch of staff members—which at different times included a kindly Irish

matron, a sharp-tongued Australian art teacher, an urbane and immensely sophisticated Uttar Pradesh Muslim and a tweed-jacketed Principal with a passion for English – knew or cared much about the state's politics. If the English-speaking middle classes have a natural contempt for things political, then boarding schools such as mine only served to reinforce it.

In the latter half of the sixties, when I was still a young boy, I remember becoming aware that something

important was brewing in Tamil Nadu through the hushed whispers of my teachers. In 1967, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), led by the charismatic film scriptwriter C.N. Annadurai, overwhelmed the Congress and swept to power in the state. This change of guard was preceded by a fierce and emotional agitation against the imposition of Hindi – a protest that fired the imagination of students, led to self-immolations and rounds of police firing.

I do not recall our teachers speaking about the momentous happenings in the state in any detail. But it was pretty apparent that they regarded what was taking place as a bad thing. I guess we did too. Whether you cared about politics or not, back in those days the Congress was the natural party of English-speaking middle classes. That being so, anything opposed to it was viewed with an instinctive suspicion. I recall there was a lot of nudging and winking when the Swatantra Party's Piloo Mody visited our school. He was treated with the courtesy one would extend to any guest, but we were persuaded to believe he was unreliable, eccentric and entertained outrageous views about economic development. (Funnily enough, I recently heard someone refer to him as the Manmohan Singh of the sixties, a man whose ideas were before his time.)

Unlike the jocular Mody, the DMK didn't seem funny. Parties with strong regional identities based on language, caste and community are commonplace now. Back in those days, they seemed to pose a challenge to the country's very unity and identity. The fact that the DMK had advocated secessionism and formally renounced this plank in 1963 didn't help much either. For a certain kind of cosmopolitan Indian – or for the

deracinated English-speaking upper classes as some would prefer to say – the emergence of forces such as the DMK felt like a real threat.

The margin of the DMK victory in 1967 was stunning, but few people could have foreseen that this election would mark the beginning of such a rapid decline of the Congress party. Neither could many have anticipated that Tamil Nadu – if you ignore the brief spells of President's Rule – would be under the rule of one of two major Dravidian parties for a period of almost four decades or ever since.

As you might expect of such a long period, this has been a time of both achievement and failure. The DMK opposed the Emergency and has consistently struggled for a more thoroughgoing and genuine federalism. Tamil Nadu is the country's sixth most populous state but one of the better-off in terms of both per capita income and growth. Advances in literacy rates and curbs in population growth have been achieved partly through innovative measures such as former Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran's midday meal scheme. It was rubbished as a populist measure when it was launched in the early eighties, but the growing recognition of its social impact led the Supreme Court to direct all states to implement an MGR-style midday meal scheme in 2001, which it described as 'a joy – a living example of what can be achieved when quality safeguards are in place.'

On the debit side are such things as the substantial growth in corruption, a marked tendency towards intolerance and authoritarianism and a climate marred by a worrying, all-consuming and potentially calamitous political hatred. I will return to the last issue later, but a detailed balance sheet of credits and debits would be out of

place in a rambling and personalized political essay of this nature. A more appropriate, even if somewhat flippancy way of looking at Dravidian politics – the result of a movement born from ideology and protest – is to see how it fared in dealing with its enemies, with what it fiercely opposed.

Some commentators have portrayed the Dravidian political movement as having emerged out of the opposition to four principal evils – Brahminism, Hindi, Religion and Casteism. If this were so, then the four fell into two distinct categories. The first two enemies were pushovers; the last two have proved formidable, much too resilient to vanquish.

At less than three per cent of the Tamil Nadu population, Brahmins were a cinch. Even though they continue to flourish in the private sector and the arts, their overwhelming dominance in politics and in government was quickly broken. In fact, the available evidence shows that the challenge to Brahmin domination had begun at the turn of the 20th century with increasing numbers of non-Brahmin castes being admitted to school and college. It was against such a background that the richer sections of the non-Brahmin castes founded the Justice Party in 1916, the ideological precursor to Periyar's Dravida Kazhagam and Annadurai's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

Organizations such as the DK and the DMK were fighting Brahminism and not Brahmins. But waging a political campaign against the idea is difficult to sustain when its proponents have been rendered politically irrelevant and when they are not big oppressive landowners in rural areas. Dravidian parties prefer to ignore this, but on the ground, the real caste tensions exist between the non-Brahmin castes, principally between

Dalits and other backward castes. Clashes between Thevars and Dalits reached a feverish pitch in the southern districts as recently as 1997-1998. According to the state government estimates, at least 251 people were killed in caste violence between August 1995 and October 1998. Tense situations because of strained relations between the Dalits and the Vanniyars are not uncommon in Tamil Nadu's northern districts.

As for Hindi, the battle against its imposition was won at considerable human cost. But the fierce agitation forced the Centre to capitulate completely on the plan to make Hindi the sole official language. Non Hindi-speaking states were assured that Hindi would not be imposed as the sole language of communication between Centre and state governments as long as even one state objected. Moreover, the Centre made it clear that examinations for the central government services could be taken in any of the scheduled languages.

The battle against Hindi-imposition was won in 1965, months after the protests were launched. Today, the problem, as some Dravidian parties see it, comes from another and unexpected quarter: English. In a state where the political class, a fair section of it anyway, is obsessed about protecting the purity of the mother tongue, spoken or colloquial Tamil borrows heavily from English. Tamglish has been around decades before the term Hinglish was invented and, with every passing month, more and more English words seem to find their way into spoken Tamil.

Tamils recognize that English is a passport to social and economic betterment as much as anyone else in India. English medium primary schools have mushroomed in the state. Worried about this, the DMK govern-

ment issued an order four years ago that Tamil be the sole medium of instruction in the state. However, the Madras High Court struck down the order; one of the arguments in favour of annulling it was that parents have a right about the choice of education they would like their children to be exposed to.

What about religion and casteism? Rationalism was one of the cornerstones of Periyar's historic and revolutionary self-respect movement, but Dravidian parties have made their peace with religion. In theory, the DMK still professes rationalism, but in practice it prefers to avoid addressing the issue. As for the AIADMK, it has given up even this pretence. During both her terms as chief minister, Jayalalithaa has made no secret of her religiosity and has gone out of the way to undertake schemes for temple renovation and for the welfare of priests.

As for casteism, what impact has the Dravidian movement – which culminated in four decades of Dravidian rule – had on the phenomenon? Periyar decried casteism and promoted intercaste marriages and reservations have been extended to benefit a slew of backward castes. But is caste sentiment less prevalent than elsewhere, for example, the neighbouring southern states? It is probably impossible to make such sweeping comparisons with any accuracy, but caste calculations have become an abiding feature of the polity. The 2001 assembly election saw a proliferation of outfits based either on caste or communal lines. Most of them were accommodated in the DMK-led front, which was possibly banking that the incremental votes they would deliver would count in what was essentially a bipolar contest.

The nascent Makkal Tamil Desam, founded by a former AIADMK

minister, was accommodated with an eye on the Yadava votes in the southern districts. The Kongu Nadu Makkal Katchi was unabashed in its portrayal as a part of the Gounders and the Tamil Nadu Mutharaiyars Sangam, as the name suggests, was a party for the Mutharaiyars. Added to these were other formations such as the Tamil Nadu Muslim United Jammait, a breakaway group from the Tamil Maanila Congress led by the late G.K. Moopanar, and the Thondar Congress, founded by a former state Congress president with an eye on gathering Nadar votes. As it turned out, these parties performed very poorly, leading some commentators to conclude that they were rejected by an electorate that found these upstart caste and communal parties simply unacceptable. But their poor performance must also be viewed in the context of the overwhelming defeat of the DMK-led front, which was all but trounced by the one put together by Jayalalithaa's AIADMK.

My first brushes with Tamil Nadu's politics came when I worked in what was then Calcutta for a now defunct weekly magazine. Among the occasional reporting assignments I did in what was then Madras was a cover story on who was then Jayalalitha. (She had not added the additional 'a' to her name at the time). This was in 1991 and Jayalalithaa had stormed to power with an enormous majority. She was still in her honeymoon period and the national press seemed fascinated with the new chief minister. Her tough and no-nonsense ways – which, among other things, was reflected in the manner in which she dealt with the LTTE – won her many admirers.

She had agreed to an interview. However, when the appointed day arrived, I received a call saying she

was down with a sore throat and fever. Could the questions be faxed? She promised to answer them. The headline on the magazine cover we had designed read 'The Iron Butterfly' and I asked her what she felt about the description. I was struck by the force and intelligence of her reply. She pointed out that Iron Butterfly was used to describe Imelda Marcos, implying that she had nothing in common with the controversial Philippines leader. 'I agree with iron,' she said, 'but not butterfly.'

I returned to Kolkata and wrote an extremely flattering piece accompanying the interview, the kind of article that any politician would have been delighted with. Or so I thought. After the article was published, I spoke to the official who coordinated the interview. I was surprised to learn that he had been asked to convey to me 'Madam's displeasure with a line here and another there in the article. I cannot recall exactly what all her objections were. But apparently, she felt I was somewhat uncharitable about her rôle as a parliamentarian. There was also a suggestion that I had been too kind to her DMK rivals at one point in the article.

In some ways, this was my first lesson in Tamil Nadu politics. Criticism, even of the mildest kind, is frowned upon; a kind word about a political rival is regarded with disapproval. One year later, in 1992, I moved to Madras to work for the *Indian Express*. It was only then that I realized the extent of the bitterness and acrimony between the two major Dravidian parties, the DMK and the AIADMK. To the four evils they are supposedly waging a war against, either party could add the other as a fifth.

Political hatred is commonplace in India, but I suggest that what exists

in Tamil Nadu has no parallel. The relationship, if this is the right word for it, between the DMK and the AIADMK is characterized by a total and all-consuming revulsion. So much so, politics is not a competitive game for power but a platform for pursuing hostile agendas. The consequences of such an attitude have already been extremely undesirable. How dangerous this can be in the long run is something that is not adequately recognized.

One way of examining the mutual hatred between the two big Tamil Nadu parties is by looking at the non-relationship between its leaders, the AIADMK's Jayalalithaa and the DMK's M. Karunanidhi – something that sets the tone for the non-relationship between those in the middle and lower rungs of their respective parties. To my mind, one somewhat trivial incident illustrates this non-relationship best. In February 2001, Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi boarded the same flight from Madurai to Chennai, after completing a leg of campaigning for the Lok Sabha election. The very fact that they sat on opposite sides of the aisle on the same flight sent the press into a frenzy. Airline sources were questioned to find out whether they spoke to each other. (No, they did not.) Did they at least exchange a hello? (Nope.) One newspaper described the fact that they were on the same commercial airliner as 'incredible'.

The vicarious interest provoked by an accidental encounter in an aircraft illustrates the extent of how personal (or impersonal) Tamil Nadu's politics has become. Even a hello between the two leaders becomes news. What originally caused the relationship to plummet to such an extraordinary low is not clear. But the one between Karunanidhi and the AIADMK's founder, M.G. Ramachandran (who split the DMK) wasn't quite like this

at all. Underneath the bitterness lay a grudging acknowledgement, even respect, for each other. It is exactly this complex attitude that film maker Mani Ratnam attempted to explore in his emotional, and somewhat cloying, *Iruvar*. DMK flags flew at half-mast when MGR died in 1987 and Karunanidhi's generous condolence message suggested that their personal relationship outweighed their political differences.

In the early years, there were a number of incidents which sharpened the antagonism, the principal one perhaps being the violent incidents in the state assembly during Karunanidhi's short tenure as chief minister in 1989. Jayalalithaa alleged her 'dignity' and 'modesty' were assaulted by DMK MLAs, something they completely denied – resulting in two totally disparate accounts of the events. But if there was a time when the equation between the DMK and the AIADMK reached the point of no return, it was in 1996.

In that year, the DMK swept to power on a tidal wave of resentment against Jayalalithaa, who had completed her first term as chief minister. In alliance with G.K. Moopanar's newly formed Tamil Maanila Congress, the DMK made the 'corruption of the Jayalalithaa regime' its central campaign plank – a strategy that worked. So deep was the resentment against her rule that Jayalalithaa was defeated in her constituency (Barugur) and her party was virtually wiped out of the state's electoral map.

Having promised to 'expose Jayalalithaa's corruption', the DMK government was expected to conduct a few investigations against members in the previous regime. Nobody, however, could have anticipated the extraordinary scale of the exercise. Apart from Ms. Jayalalithaa, corruption

investigations were launched against virtually every minister in her cabinet. A number of them were arrested (Jayalalithaa spent 27 days in remand) as were a few senior bureaucrats. At one time there were preliminary inquiries into approximately one-third of the total strength of IAS officers in the state. Of course, only a few of them reached the charge sheet stage.

As someone who spent a lot of time in those days meeting bureaucrats in the Secretariat at Fort St. George, I could not help being struck by how totally engrossed the state government was in this exercise. Key officials of the Karunanidhi regime spent more time on these cases than on their routine work. Clearly, there was and is no parallel – no comparable instance of a government initiating such a systematic and wide-ranging exercise to prosecute members of the political opposition. Some have argued that this was necessary because of the unprecedented corruption during the Jayalalithaa regime. Others believe that the huge landslide in favour of the DMK had led Karunanidhi to misread the situation. In other words, the corruption cases were mechanisms to place a judicial seal on Jayalalithaa's already finished political career.

As things turned out, Jayalalithaa performed extremely well in the Lok Sabha election two years later, a poll that saw a BJP-led government in place at the Centre. Having gained a critical toehold at the Centre, she began pressuring it to take action against the DMK government in Tamil Nadu. Her decision to pull the plug on Vajpayee in 1999 was a result of her frustration over the BJP's reluctance to do as she wanted – principally, its refusal to impose President's Rule in Tamil Nadu. Even before she returned to power in 2001, in an assembly election in which the DMK was all but

routed, she had made one thing clear. She would do unto 'them' what was done unto her. There has been a worrying familiarity to the subsequent events. Karunanidhi and other DMK leaders were arrested, corruption cases slapped on a number of former DMK ministers and so on.

Such goings on in Tamil Nadu suggest that in their mutual hatred, the two principal players have forgotten that politics – even at its worst – is but a competitive game for power. It is not – or at any rate should not be – a mechanism for carrying out vendettas, for taking decisions that are vindictive or vengeful. The damage this has done to the state is not adequately recognized and the potential it has to harm it even further is rarely addressed. What is obvious in the meantime is that it is not merely the two parties alone that have been hurt by this acrimonious relationship. It is the state itself.

It has led to a situation where the bureaucracy is demoralized and, perhaps worse, is divided down the middle on the basis of political loyalties – either real or perceived. Even the judiciary and the press have not been free from the influence of such acrimony, which has resulted in a political attitude that suggests 'you are either with us or against us.' It has created a situation where the two parties are unable to make common cause even on issues that are vital for the well-being of the state – for example, the Cauvery water dispute. And it has consumed too much governmental time on such things as charge sheets and arrests, time much better spent on the larger issues of administering the state. In short, the implications of the politics of retribution in Tamil Nadu do not stop with the polity alone. They have a bearing on the very social and economic well-being of the state.

Weird, warped, or plain wonderful?

SCHARADA BAIL

IT was apparent quite soon after my arrival as a young bride twenty years ago, that Chennai, or Madras as it was then known, was very different from any of the places I had lived in before. It wasn't just the North-South difference, though this was the source of a big handicap in the beginning – my lack of Tamil. It was also in the very manner of absolute strangers. Somehow, in the first conversation, such people seemed to want to get to the roots of my identity. Was I a vegetarian or non-vegetarian? Did I live in my 'own' house or a rented one? Was I a Brahmin or non-Brahmin?

Having just arrived from Mumbai, or Bombay as it was then known, I found such a concern with matters personal amusing, irritating, disturbing or distressing as my mood and circumstances dictated. While I understood it as a need to slot me into neat mental categories, obviously important for people here, I could not help comparing it with the carefree cosmopolitanism of my Bombay upbringing. What did it matter if one's friends were Hindu, Parsi, Muslim or Christian? Why should the state of

anyone's home concern us, whether it was in a chawl, a block of flats on Warden Road, or more discreet lodgings in Grant Road? We lounged at Regal or the Gateway, Kala Ghoda or Metro and never saw the insides of our friend's houses, far less probed into their eating habits.

So Chennai felt like moving back in time – a place where social, religious and cultural categories really counted for a lot. I was standing at a bus stop when a woman turned around and said to me, absolutely out of the blue, 'You are not from Madras, isn't it?' I confessed to the crime, out of sheer surprise. She nodded, comforted by her diagnosis being confirmed. 'I can make out by your jewellery,' she said. Her reference was to the silver I wore, in personal preference to gold which is the standard ornamental uniform for a woman from the South. Now, twenty years later, neighbours and friends view my continued preference for silver indulgently. Then, it was another factor setting me apart.

I railed and ranted at the provincial mindset as I perceived it, and burst into occasional tears (a pardonable

excess of youth), till slowly, other aspects of Chennai's difference from other cities, especially the metros, began to sink in. The modest ordinariness of high achievers was something that seemed to characterize life around me. The elderly gentleman, quietly letting himself out of the gate to his house at 4.30 am in the morning, could have been a scientist at one of the country's leading research establishments (and often was). But that did not prevent him from going to fetch his own milk from the booth. Or the most celebrated nightingale from the South who would answer her own phone and artlessly respond to all callers without a trace of snobbery. I observed that humility and high personal and professional standards had a big place in Chennai's mind and heart, and this took away some of my initial discomfort. Over the years, this discomfort has changed to a fierce love for Chennai, the oddest of metros.

Unlike Mumbai, where Parsis provide sufficient lore in the chronicling of eccentrics and eccentricities, Chennai does not have a resident community of oddballs. But this in no way diminishes the possibilities of eccentricity creeping into many visible areas. In fact, Chennai is highly tolerant of many examples of 'way, way out' behaviour, which goes completely against its staid and stolid image of a conservative metro. Consider, for instance, our politicians. It was Chennai that first showed how dark glasses, usually synonymous with Mafia men, could actually be such effective instruments in the creation of a political persona. MGR's dark glasses are still the most distinguishing feature when rustic children dress up like him for fancy dress events. As for Mr. Karunanidhi's, they enable him to have a rosy-tinted view of the world, when everything else is quite literally, dark.

Other quirky accoutrements of Chennai's politicians have been the saree-matching capes that Ms. Jayalalithaa sported the last time she was CM, and the same-sex companion that she flaunts with impunity whether she is CM or not. In fact, this single appendage is the source of much grievance and resentment, but however much people may speculate about the exact nature of the companion's relationship with the CM, there is no denying that there is public acceptance of this arrangement.

There are other, darker aspects to the eccentricity of politicians that are only whispered about, but which border on the bizarre. These range from the tales of Karunanidhi marrying a Brahmin virgin when in his seventies to revive his political career (this has to be seen in the light of the Dravidian parties avowed anti-Brahminism, apart from being condemned from a feminist perspective!), to the many *yagnas* and *homas* performed by Jayalalithaa for the annihilation of her political foes (most people consider these to have had a supremely successful effect). In swallowing the superstitious, recidivist and reactionary eccentricities of its leaders, Chennaites show a tolerance that is in keeping with the most avant-garde of the millennium.

In fact, when these eccentricities are brought into the public glare; through the medium of cinema, for instance, they are not well received. Thus, while Mani Rathnam's 'Iruvar' was a film much loved by critics, it could not wow the box-office with its depiction of MGR's love life and Karunanidhi's, or its projection of Aishwarya Rai as the young Jayalalithaa. Perhaps this reluctance to focus publicly on the oddities of its leaders is also part of Chennai's very clear attachment to privacy for the famous.

For a city whose dwellers think nothing of probing into your personal life as soon as they meet you, Chennai is a city very committed to guarding the privacy of its celebrities. Nobody here, not even the models and film stars, much less the corporate big wigs or their wives, is rushing to make it to Page Three. In fact, the highest grossing film star of 2003, Vikram, lived in a modest rented house in Besant Nagar till he bought a larger place, and his wife works as a de-addiction counsellor at TTK hospital, unsought by any film journalists or society columnists. Their comfortable obscurity is in stark contrast to the media-savvy manoeuvring of Mumbai and Delhi, where the likes of Parmeshwar Godrej, Nina Pillai and Nafisa Ali pepper the newsprint with uncanny regularity.

The distinct social and cultural divisions in Chennai resonate with their own eccentricities. There is the genteel Brahmin, classical music and dance loving culture of the December music festival, and the robust, Dravidian, Chicken 65 and punch-up culture of the hoi polloi. When it comes to the music festival, it is difficult to know where eccentricities start and where they end. For instance, one can go and sit next to a gently dozing elderly lady 'rasika' at a music concert, who has her more alert, muffled husband (any day when you do not actually sweat is extreme winter for Chennaites, and calls for protection), sitting and moving his head in appreciation of the music, right beside her.

When Kadri Gopalnath's powerful saxophone strikes its opening notes, the lady gets up and notices. 'It's Kanyakumari,' she remarks to her husband, referring to Ms. A. Kanyakumari, who generally accompanies Kadri Gopalnath on the violin. 'She's wearing a mango-coloured

saree, isn't she? She always does. Nothing but bright mango coloured silk.' Her husband merely grunts in acknowledgement of this bit of superior knowledge, but as an overhearing listener, your mind can be teeming with a hundred questions and observations.

Is it common knowledge that Kanyakumari only wears shades of sunflower yellow or bright mango colour? Does everyone know that she also gets up at 3.30 am every morning and has already bathed thrice and done many pujas before most people get up? What about this lady rasika and many like her and her husband? How do they manage to sleep in such damned uncomfortable chairs? Is the Chennai December festival a celebration of music and dance or a fiendish conspiracy to inflict torture hatched by cunning aliens? Weird thoughts come naturally in one's mind in these surroundings.

Ms Kanyakumari is also not the only eccentric musician on public view in December. Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan, another famous violinist, has made his smeared-with-red-sindoor-forehead, accompanied by kindly leer, a familiar sight for many decades, apart from his special individual style of playing which consists of giving the violin strings regular 'pings' with his fingers in the midst of the normal bow plying. Balamuralikrishna can compete with Kunnakudi in appreciation of pretty young female 'rasikas', and his hair is growing a more jet shade of black in direct proportion to the passing years. Musicians are pardoned their highly individual styles and manner in Chennai, as are certain high-profile 'rasikas' like Mrs Y.G. Parthasarathy, redoubtable head of a group of educational institutions, who arrives for concerts assisted by a three-footed

cane, covered with chains of different stones and metals, and always sits in the first row, because that is where she belongs.

Cricket, like music, has its own passionate following in Chennai, and some very distinguished names of the sport have their special quirks. S. Venkatrughavan, current international umpire, former Indian spinner and captain, who was rumoured to have been a suitor to Hema Malini at one time, is also known for the choicest Tamil expletives that flow smoothly off his tongue. In fact, cricketers from the league level of the game swap his most memorable 'gems' among themselves. Another memorable character is T.E. Srinivasan, a right-handed batsman who scored oodles of runs against fast bowlers in domestic cricket. His talent and run getting were not sufficient to draw the selector's attention, however, and he made a late entry into the national team in 1980-81. When the Indians went Down Under to play the Aussies, T.E. is reputed to have declared, 'Tell Lillee T.E. is here!' in reference to the dreaded fast bowler of those days, a statement so brimming with confidence that it is a pity it was never put to the test as T.E.'s services were not called upon by the team management.

Customs and rituals may seem to be a sign of collective weirdness for some, but in Chennai they acquire a significantly dynamic form. The Kanchi Mutt of the Sankaracharya and his junior Sankaracharya, exercise a powerful influence over Chennai society, just as globalization and western concepts do. What the Chennaiite, ever adaptable, does is to achieve a balance in habit and belief, to suit both. Thus, in the last couple of decades, New Year's Eve was an occasion for many Chennai citizens

to head for their neighbourhood temple. What better way to usher in a bright new year than in the presence of God?

So, on New Year's Eve, the neighbourhood temple was jam-packed by 11.30 pm, never mind if drunken revelers were shouting and screaming immediately outside. The nadaswaram and thavil were played to herald the New Year *darshan*, while the deity was hidden from view by a velvet curtain. Only when the temple clock showed 12:00 did this veil lift, to the accompaniment of audible gasps from assembled devotees. In addition, there was usually a scuffle, and much jostling and shoving to be the first to receive the *aarti* from the lamp that the priest had waved around the deity. In this adaptation of Western Gregorian calendar to Eastern worship everyone was happy.

Not so the Sankaracharya. This year, he declared in advance that the *Shastras* did not recommend this practice, as it clashed with the hour when the deity was at rest in the temple sanctum sanctorum. In conceding to the popular thirst for midnight darshan, he did not prohibit temples from staying open at the midnight hour, only advised that the 'aarti' flame be shown to devotees from within the sanctum, rather than be brought outside in the normal way. This was duly followed, so that from New Year's Eve 2004, temple-goers received their 'darshan' and were even spared their scuffle! If only this clever example of Hindu adaptability would teach something to Shiv Sainiks and VHP venomists.

Another year, the Sankaracharya had declared that it was auspicious for married women to receive green sarees from their parental homes. More green was sold that year than in any other time, and store-owners must have rejoiced at this particular harvest. However, the choice

of the colour green for this pronouncement is not without its significance. Was the Kanchi religious head also asking his followers to take a more affectionate view of the adherents of another religion, for whom green is worthy of reverence? A definite shot in the arm for secularists.

In fact, for all its overt Hindu religiosity, Chennai finds it easier to keep the communal peace than some other cities because anti-Muslim sentiment is not rabidly expressed in the public arena. This is partly due to historical reasons—Muslim looters from foreign lands only managed minimal damage to the splendid Hindu temples and monuments in Tamil Nadu. It is also because of the cheek by jowl coexistence of orthodox Hindus, mostly Iyengars, but sometimes Iyers also, with Muslims. Triplicane in Chennai is a fine example of this, where, if you are a newcomer, and cannot find your way to the Sri Parthasarathy temple through the maze of lanes, some kind person in a skullcap and beard will give you directions. While leaders of the hate-spewing kind undoubtedly exist in Chennai's midst, so far, they seem to have been kept at bay by the necessities of Dravidian politics. Touch wood, and amen.

After two decades in this seaside metro, I am more at home with the quirky traits that make Chennai special, than I was as a Mumbai exile with youthful expectations. It is true that these twenty years have made Chennai more and more like the other cities in many ways—the same shops, malls, designer labels, restaurants that the other cities offer. But in many significant ways, Chennai retains its original spirit, its own special way of doing things, which is usually remarkably efficient and impressive.

Chennai does spoil you for other places, because the people who serve

do it with an added personal touch, which makes the gesture far more than a casual thing. The times when I have had a vehicle breakdown because of a burst tyre, or engine failure in pouring rain, we have always been rescued by passers by, who, after picking you up to give you a lift in their car, discover that you live in the same street as their brother-in-law, or have a child in the same school as their niece. Many years of this has given me a different perspective on the personal questions too. So what if people are more than necessarily curious? They are also very often genuinely concerned about you as a person.

Besides, the lack of a need to maintain surface appearances is very reassuring in Chennai. As a friend of mine put it years ago, 'Bangalore's great for a visit, but I could never live there—people put on lipstick and chiffon in the morning when they go to buy bread and milk! Our Madras is the best, at least we can buy vegetables at our gate in a nightie, with our hair in an oily knot, and its perfectly ok!' For a city to retain this outlook in times of FTV is indeed remarkable.

In the final analysis, what Chennai has is plenty of individuality, rather than just eccentricity. While originality does lend interest to dull routine, and many Chennai practices might appear weird to denizens of other metros, Chennaiites themselves will cling to these examples of weirdness as an inseparable ingredient of the quality of life they perceive for themselves. Chennai is a city of very hard-working people, beset by water problems, ruled by strange leaders, and crammed with the latest gleaming cars in India. The fact that so many of its people seem to be marching to the beat of their own special drums makes it even more desirable.

Chennai:Madras

DEBORAH THIAGARAJAN

I NEVER acknowledged the name Chennai as an English name for Madras. It was always the name I read in Tamil script on the buses of the city. Chennai in Tamil script, Madras in English and spoken Tamil. Madras was a city that happily harboured this duality of language and name and was comfortable with both languages, at least among its college educated citizens. Language has been a source of pride among Madrasis, and it was common even in the '70s to hear Tamil speaking Madrasis converse among themselves in English, with mastery over both languages. As a young American woman arriving in Madras in 1970 with my Tamil husband, I took refuge and comfort in the prevalence of English while struggling to learn Tamil.

Language – this is an issue which has stirred Madras and its politicians over the last 34 years that I have been experiencing the happenings of Chennai. It is one of the keys to the

character of the citizens of Chennai. The fixation with Tamil and English both hides and reveals many facets of what makes Madras such a charming and culturally significant city to live in. Madrasis regard the Tamil language as the key to the essence of their culture. English is their window to the wider world; Hindi, an imposition of an alien, aggressive culture trying to dominate. However, the reality today is that the knowledge of 'good' Tamil is dwindling among the children of Madras' elite thanks to English medium schools and, slowly, ever so subtly, the knowledge of Hindi is increasing, mainly through the cinema and TV.

Madras has a reputation of being conservative. And it is. It is socially conservative, but that has been changing rapidly during the last ten years. The first lesson I learned was that the character and strength of a Tamil matriarch was kept happily camouflaged by her outward demeanour and

dress: the Kanchipuram silk sari, diamond nose studs and earrings, sleekly oiled hair in a bun decorated with jasmine, a gold chain and *tali* around her neck and vermillion *pottu* on her forehead. Accompanying this traditional dress was usually a demure, almost languorous and self-effacing demeanour. This was the outward face of the married Tamil woman in Madras, carefully nurtured through her youth by a protective mother and a hoard of aunts.

Underneath this exterior, however, was a keen, thinking mind, often a progressive one. Unfortunately, up through the '70s it could usually only emerge into action with some twist of events, as was witnessed by the unleashed energy of Madras women during independence or as a consequence to the tragedy of widowhood. The choice before the Madras woman in the '70s was social compliance to restrictive rules or face the consequences of social ostracism. Most gave in, but the few who broke away discovered that they could make it on their own and gain respect for it.

During my early years in Madras I met enough of these strong women, who today are in their late '60s, '70s and '80s, to realize that they were made of a metal that few American women could compete with. And they influenced and inspired me and gave me the direction I took in my life in Madras. They also inspired their daughters so that it is now my generation of women who are working, and who have brought up their daughters as equals to their sons, living and experiencing the wider world in a way they could not. These children, like other young adults throughout India, are pushing the limits of Madras' conservatism and bringing in rapid change.

And how is Madras changing? There is the obvious. A soaring popu-

lation, cars which choke the roads, a surge in new businesses and new business opportunities, including IT, the entry of many new players from all over India, an increase in MNCs and the foreign population that accompanies that, an unsolved problem of garbage and debris, the influence of the media, cable TV and the cinema for which Madras is famous, the rise of modern consumer oriented stores and a sprouting of good restaurants of every kind. Madras now boasts of Korean, Japanese, Thai, Fusion, Middle Eastern, French, Continental and Chinese restaurants alongside a whole range of Indian restaurants of every type and from every region. The restaurants with foreign fare are filled with the young, many of whom work in the thriving IT sector. The Indian style restaurants have a large family clientele. This is a huge change from the '70s when good restaurants were almost non-existent and eating out was considered something that you did only if you couldn't eat at home.

Madras has also become the consumer capital of India. Another aspect of the Madrasis which has influenced the character and pace of the city is the Tamil disdain for public ostentation in spending. Madrasis have never been ones to easily part with their money. Theirs has always been a low-key lifestyle. No outward show of money was considered positive. So with the consumer boom Madrasis are weighing the way they spend their money and they want value. If a product is tested and succeeds in Madras, I am told that the chances of it succeeding throughout India are high.

I admire this aspect of Madras. It makes life comfortable. No keeping up with the neighbours, no Rs 75,000 designer sets. Wear what you like, but don't make it too flashy unless, of course, it's your diamonds, the one

weakness of the Madrasi. Gold, diamonds, Kanchipuram saris, weddings, the *shastiathapurti* or renewing of the marriage vows at age 60; and family functions – these were what Madrasis traditionally spent their money on. Now it's education abroad for the children, health, the family home or flat, and consumer items which make for more convenient living. House pride has also made its appearance, and those with money are now indulging themselves in home decorations, altering the ascetic living environments of the '70s. The Kanchipuram sari is seen less and less, but still holds sway at weddings. Otherwise the salwar kameez and all its modern avatars are in.

Forme Madras was a journey of discovery, like the opening of a lotus with each petal revealing one of its secrets. These secrets were the cultural avenues which Madras offered: learning yoga with T.T. Desikachari for nine years; experiencing the dance of Kalakshetra, the music of the home *katcharis*; a youthful Cholamandal artist's village which then held folk performances and craft workshops as well as art exhibitions, exploring Tamil and the literature of the Sangam period, the bhakti movement, learning Sanskrit, uncovering the history of the Pallava and Chola kings through inscriptions and temples.

For each of these discoveries there were dedicated people in Madras, scholars and experts willing to take time to help me in my learning. Malcolm Adiseshiah and the Madras Institute of Development Studies guided me in sociological explorations into caste; C. Subramaniam offered his political strategy insights when I organized an INTACH campaign on clean water and the Cooum River; Dashrath Patel explored his beliefs on design as I contemplated

beginning the DakshinaChitra project to promote the traditional arts of the South; Chandrakala, the dancer, threw questions at me again and again to make me think; K.V. Raman and R. Nagasamy helped me unravel the complex history of temple and cult development in the South. I experienced the *guru shishya* tradition, alive and generous and so empowering in its support and encouragement. And this is all part of what makes Madras so culturally alive.

Madras is not a city which comes to you. This perhaps goes along with its understatedness. For many it is a long adjustment just in getting everyday life into order. But if one looks beyond to what the city has to offer there are treasures galore, if one is open to them, and many warm, accepting Madrasis willing to help or to listen.

In the world of culture Madras is beginning to truly blossom. I used to marvel at the raging controversies Madras *rasikas* had about Carnatic musicians. Each had his/her own like or dislike of styles and musical interpretations. These controversies, I decided, keep music at the centre-stage in Madras, and have resulted in the December Madras musical festival as an annual happening. The earlier rasikas were Mylapore Brahmins, stereotyped, maligned, but widely admired. They can be applauded for their work and for planting the seeds that are ensuring the continuity and evolution of Carnatic music in Madras.

Today culture in Madras is expanding to include the visual arts and more experimental programmes in theatre and dance. Madras is finally seeing the beginnings of good architecture, after at least 60 years of mediocre to bad buildings. As employment opportunities open up to the young they are moving out into new areas and developing interests beyond the tradi-

tional domains of their parents. This augurs well for the development of Madras as a major cultural centre in India. The city, however, still lacks that vital spinal cord which holds all the art forms and people working in the arts together.

Sometimes young people express a sense of feeling that they are working in a vacuum, but this is changing rapidly. New people and institutions offer new arenas and programmes; Anita Ratnam, Prakriti Foundation, and other cultural organizations for the Other Festival, innovative performances, music, lectures and special seminars; Amethyst for its venue for programmes and *adas*, and even the press for their recent Metro pages which bring the buzz and interest to the public at large. Corporate Madras has come forward to support these activities without whose funding they could not exist.

Yes, Madras is changing, and rapidly. I sensed the beginning pulses of this change in the early '80s and have witnessed the consequences. The destruction of some of Madras' and the South's most interesting heritage sites, a rupture of Madras youth from their parents' and grandparents' earlier rural roots, the intoxication with things new. No longer are the youth making the mandatory journey in their holidays to their *ur* or ancestral village for weddings and functions. This tie that bound Madras to its cultural practices has ceased in the last ten years. And yet, Madras has not let me down. Its cultural moorings are deep and they are loosening, but have not been lost.

I have admired these cultural roots. It was easy for me as a young married woman from a different culture to respect them and to be motivated to delve into them and their meanings, since people held them with pride. If they presented the world as black and

white without the shades of grey which tend to engulf us today, it was all right. They presented a tableau which one could question, and hunt for the answers oneself.

Madras taught me that in the end it is what you believe, and what you feel is right for you, that you must do. I listened sporadically to the spiritual *swamijis* giving talks in Madras. They are ubiquitous, and they have lessons on life. Madrasis throng to them every season in great numbers, young and old, male and female. These lessons bring you back to the basics: they are about compassion, giving, peace of mind, the shrinking of the ego and the lessons of the Gita. I would like to think that Madras still harkens to the messages, even if in diluted form.

Madrass still has a humanity about it that I have not noticed in a city like Delhi. There is no fear on the streets, no intangible feeling of aggression. Socialization on the streets or in shops reflects a harmony of interaction which stems from respect. Even eve teasing, the plague of young women in Indian cities, is largely under control in Madras although it has its moments. In a report on the position of women in India, Tamil Nadu, including Madras, took the number one place in the country for respect for women. When I first came to Madras I was shocked to see homes and settlements of the poor next to homes of the well to do. I now feel that this proximity had the effect of creating a balance in the minds of the people, by giving those less economically fortunate a personalized, and familiar face.

How long this peaceful integration of society will last is a question. The settlement patterns of Madras show a marked increase in slums and populations under the poverty line. Some of these slums are village com-

munities which grew and were absorbed into urban Madras, and the environment. Though physically degraded, they are psychologically supportive of children and family ties. Others are not, but I cannot judge to what extent any of these families or settlements are able to access the opportunities of modernization; I am no longer in touch with these communities as I was when I worked on environment and malaria campaigns throughout the length and breadth of the city. I fear the anonymity that comes with high-rise, modern urban living of the western variety.

What has influenced me is the bright, attentive eyes filled with anticipation of the young children I have seen in the many city schools of Madras. It was into these school classrooms that I, with the untiring enthusiasm of V.R. Devika, brought in both classical and the folk performing art performances under the auspices of the Madras Craft Foundation from 1987 to 1996. The MCF goal was to create an awareness of the rich diversity of the cultural forms of the South of India in the public and in the city schools. With INTACH's intervention for the preservation of the environment and the built heritage, I, as the INTACH Tamil Nadu convener for 14 years, initiated a larger environment and cultural preservation programme for the city.

But as cultural as Madras is, it has still to acknowledge the importance of its built and visual heritage, (even in 2004). Neither politicians nor bureaucrats have passed or supported heritage legislation to protect a single building, and protection, case by case, must still run through a court of law. The struggle to protect the built heritage, worldwide, must begin at the grassroots level with enough people clamouring for their right to their heri-

tage and history over the demands of development for profit.

But in Madras only a handful of citizens were sufficiently concerned to be actively involved in fighting for this protection of the heritage. And so, the DakshinaChitra project I had conceived in 1984 of creating a museum for the promotion of the crafts, textiles and folk performing arts, grew into a larger conceptual project for the creation of awareness and promotion of the architecture and arts of the everyday lives of the diverse peoples of South India.

DakshinaChitra born as a concept in 1984, opened to the public in December 1996, and continues to evolve both in its programmes, exhibitions and institutional framework. It is a gift of Madras to Madras, the sustained work of all the people who volunteered their time and their effort, many in training me to be able to guide and sustain and persevere in the creation of DakshinaChitra, and many who joined the project out of their commitment to the significance of their culture.

Madras is inspiring. DakshinaChitra took root because Madras is a fertile Mecca for cultural projects. The public has also embraced the centre and we now have the wider Tamil middle class visiting, enjoying the reconnection to their rural roots, its architecture, folk performers and artisans. If DakshinaChitra continues to be a catalyst for new ways of looking at the past, at heritage and at its connection to the future, I will be rewarded. After all, only in Madras would the public, even the state government who gave the land, have encouraged and nudged a now, not so young American girl to embark on and accomplish a project she had barely envisioned 20 years back. A project which grew out of the way Madras and Tamil Nadu embraced her.

Virtual reality

GEETA DOCTOR

IT might seem a contradiction in terms, but the most successful artist working in Chennai, currently, is the dancer Chandrakha. She is not just the most dynamic face of contemporary dance in India, with her austere, yet erotically charged compositions of dance movements by a hand-picked group of dancers who perform with robotic precision under her silvery gaze, she epitomizes the absolute need to create a brand image, no matter what the art form, in today's competitive system.

'I have always had a keen sense of space' she explains. 'It's something that comes very naturally to me. It's spontaneous.' Her posters that are now collectors' items underline a strong design sense. Many of them, made to emphasize some aspect of female power, use traditional elements such as the eyes from a Durga mask, black,

white, red or ochre colours and diagrammatic lines, or grids that frame the image in a boldly modernistic, meaning spare and bare, idiom.

As for those who enter her home, with its intimate, open-to-sky but stone wall enclosed theatre at Skills on the beach-front at Chennai, will acknowledge there is the same experience of a living space that has been informed by clear geometric lines. It is neither entirely new nor entirely traditional. The *mandala*-like enclosure of the theatre is approached by a meandering pathway through a garden that has become overgrown with trees that were planted over the years. For a performance, the viewer has to grope her or his way through a tangled semi-darkness, before getting a glimpse of the small opening that beckons with a tantalizing force of flickering light forms, merely glimpsed or hinted at on

the stage deep inside a dark and apparently empty space. The audience sits on the ground within this space. The close proximity to the performance space, a bare platform with just a couple of pillars to frame it in vertical lines, not unlike the ones that Chandralekha has used in her posters, the use of dramatic lighting that bathes the area in a suggestion of gold or red against the blackness, underlines the effect of a painting that is in progress.

trous modes of worship, of which dance was just the one that she appeared to be challenging.

Chandralekha has described the manner in which she choreographs her works elsewhere, so we shall not elaborate on this except to note that it is as she says a very 'instinctive' approach. She uses her dancers as moving signs on her canvas, drawing lines or patterns with their perfectly tuned bodies which are most often clad in her favourite colours – black-white-red-ochre, the earth colours, or blues and greens that are complementary.

Her use of esoteric names for the different compositions enhances the sense of being in touch with the mysterious and the eternal. There is none of the vulgarity associated with a title like 'Vagina Monologues' that one might encounter with a term such as *Yantra*, a composition in which she explores the female body, though they may both be exploring the same terrain as it were. Just as the visitor to her theatre has to traverse a wandering path, she too has found her inspiration in many of the till then little used traditions such as the Kalari or the Kerala form of martial arts, the Japanese Noh theatre, strong lighting techniques borrowed from western modern dance forms and placed them on the sturdy base of Bharata Natyam that has always been her starting point.

Far from forsaking tradition, she has transformed and made it an instrument that she can now use in her very own and distinctive manner. And patriarchy be damned, it is much more politically correct in today's context to focus on the female body that has found resonance both as a glamorous form and artistic fetish in a consumer driven society.

The reason that we have focused so extensively on Chandralekha's contribution to contemporary dance is

because it underlines some of the problems that are faced by the artists working in the visual arts, painting and sculpture, in the South. By contrast, the Tamil Nadu artist today, working in a contemporary idiom is all but invisible.

'No one comes to our shows. Not the general public who say they cannot understand what we are doing, not the other artists who have already established a name for themselves, not the gallery owners who prefer to promote the work of outsiders and not the critics, who are controlled by the more successful commercial galleries.' This is the complaint made by any number of young artists who come rolling out of the Government College of Arts every year.

This time round it's been voiced by a group of four artists who graduated in 1998 and who have put together a group show that they have named 'Genesis'. Each one is talented in his own way. Alagar Raja works in fibreglass, wood and acrylic colours to create highly schematic compositions that have a 3-D effect to explore what he explains in Tamil are evocations to ideas of birth and rebirth and a search for matter before the actual moment of creation, what he calls 'The Birth of Art'. He has used traditional symbols of triangles and circles in a free-wheeling manner that shows a serious engagement with his subject which is not trite or repetitive. Narayanan uses tight box-like frames to convey a highly textured and at times even richly layered effect, while Prabakaran has created a large tableaux installation in sand and painted strips against the wall.

Next to him, Ganesh uses shiny metallic objects – pieces of glass, discarded ball bearings, rows of staples and so forth – with equally reflective or brilliantly coloured metallic strips

of paper, X-ray images and so on to construct a highly complex and convoluted impressions of a city seen from different perspectives. These young artists have used a great deal of skill and imagination to reinvent a landscape of ideas and feeling. Without an audience to look at their work, far less support it, it will be difficult for them to keep going. To add to their lack of visibility, the group is so idealistic about their art that they do not even sign their works as a mark of identification with the old tradition of master-craftsmen who worked in guilds. What can one make of such idealism except to shake one's head and tell them that they are making sure that no one will recognise them in today's highly individualistic culture.

'I've got resigned to the idea that no one will come to my shows,' says Natesh, an older artist, who is in fact highly successful as an installation artist with an appetite for huge outdoor constructions that are not meant to last longer than the time of the show, and who also works as an innovative stage designer. 'That's why I make my installations to last for just a couple of hours, and use materials that are easily available. I know that no one is going to buy my work and that I will die without getting any recognition. But that does not bother me one bit. I still wake up in the morning and feel full of energy. For instance, this morning, I applied a whole segment of my canvas with Cadmium yellow paint. It was wonderful, even though there was no one to see it.'

He laughs as he says this to the Genesis group. They merely look even more dejected. 'If only we can get one person to buy one of our paintings, we could afford to keep our show going for another week.' Their show is at the Lalit Kala Akademi gallery, that they all admit has the right kind

of light and space for a work of their size and aspirations. But the truth is that without the support of a more dynamic commercial gallery person to promote their work, it will never attract an audience.

Soon enough, each one of the artists is bemoaning the fact that as long as they do not get the official patronage of those who occupy the places of power in New Delhi, it will be difficult for them to continue. Whereas in earlier times, it was possible for an artist from Chennai to seek his or her fortune in Mumbai at one of the better known galleries in the Fort area, not only are these now fully booked many months in advance, with each region aggressively branding and promoting their own stable of artistic productions, the 'Madras' artist, as anyone from the South is labelled, has little or no cachet at all. Even discerning editors, sitting in Mumbai, who commission work on the South Indian art scene groan in advance, 'No, please no more of those cheap decorative gimmicks you Southies love!' Or worse, 'We are so tired of the Cholamandal style,' as if every artist from Chennai, or the South could only come from Cholamandal. The South is just not 'sexy' enough, to use the current tabloid term to sell either articles or works of art.

How did this happen? As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, the reasons are both historic and institutional. If we start with the pre-independence period and the years following that great moment of connectivity of thoughts and minds that took place in the country, we will find that the artists of that era were fired by a common impulse. This was both to free themselves from the restrictions of the colonial past and to rediscover and reinvent a manner of expression that would be simultaneously 'modern'

and 'ancient' in keeping with the freshly articulated and officially sanctioned belief in a glorious past for the country. Artists were those who were entrusted with the task of unveiling these eternal truths that had merely been obscured through time and circumstance. South Indian artists felt particularly privileged. They could actually boast of a near unbroken tradition in many areas of artistic endeavour.

With the impetus given by a charismatic figure such as K.C.S. Paniker, who was not only Principal of the College of Arts, but who eventually went on to be a founder member of the Cholamandal Artists Village just outside Chennai, the best-known experiment in the South that would combine the living tradition of crafts with the infusion of artistic techniques and ideas brought in from all sides but particularly the West, there was a veritable explosion of talent that nurtured several gifted persons. One has only to mention persons like Redepa Naidu, Sultan Ali, P.V. Janakiram and S. Dhanapal belonging to the first wave of artists who combined both streams, the old and the new, while retaining a strong stamp of their own selves in their work to demonstrate this.

A second wave of artists amongst whom we may name Viswanathan, S.G. Vasudev, S. Nandagopal, K.V. Haridasan, P. Gopinath, C. Douglas, who are still very active, and others like V. Arnavaz, Jayapal Panicker and K. Ramanujam, who are no more, established the idea that there could be a group of artists who might belong to the same place, but who worked in a highly innovative and individualistic manner.

Apart from those who had an affinity with Cholamandal, there were those who were more closely identified with the College of Arts. Among these are L. Munnuswamy, Santhana

Raj who belong to the old guard and R.B. Bhaskaran, K.M. Adimoolam, Dakshinamoorthy of the next generation, with highly gifted individuals such as Thota Tharani, Rm. Palaniappan and Achuthan Kudallur belonging to neither faction but floating somewhere in between:

From the very moment that it was conceived, the Cholamandal Artists group managed to create an impression that they were somehow separate and enjoyed an exclusive right to represent Tamil Nadu's artistic heritage. Whether they were perceived as living in a citadel of artistic privilege meant to keep out outsiders, or as a closed community of self-serving artists, can be endlessly debated. It is certain, however, that they managed to evoke a long lasting hostility among the rest of the community of artists living in Chennai. Indeed, we might even say that it is because they were 'the community' of artists no other group has felt secure enough to survive as a group, or even want to be seen as a community of artists.

The real sufferer is, as we have seen, the fresh entrant into the artistic field. There is no one to act as a mentor or guide to the outside world. The decline of the artist's role as the keeper of the nationalist image or inner flame, also implying a lessening of importance at such venues as the once highly publicized and popular Triennales and Biennales that took place at the centre of privilege and position, New Delhi, the chance that artists from far-off places could be seen and have the opportunity to see for themselves how other artists were working, has also declined. This has increased the sense of isolation that the artist from Tamil Nadu now faces. Unlike his or her peers in a place like Kolkata that too suffers from the same political and institutional isolation, there has been

no popular movement in the arts which has come to the rescue of the individual artist.

What did invigorate the public imagination was, of course, the Dravidian movement. Not only did this replace the old ideals of a pan-Indian consciousness, it introduced another very powerful medium – cinema. Without going into further detail, it suffices to say that the cinema became as all-encompassing as religion was at one time. The actors who played the role of various gods and triumphal heroes and gently smiling Mother Goddesses and voluptuous heroines had little trouble in morphing into the real life saviours of the people. As is well-known, the models that were imitated drew on Soviet style realism to create images of invincible power, kindness towards the poor, a lover of literature and so on.

The traditional artists who had once painted the murals in temples were effortlessly absorbed into painting the film sets and fantastical props that went into creating this parallel world. Their apprentices would start their careers painting the giant billboards, the street-level slogans, the crude wall pictures that began to proliferate on auto-rickshaws, lorries, push-carts, and on places of popular usage such as barber shops and fruit and pan stalls. Initially, these brightly painted banners or billboards promoted the film stars. At a later stage, the film stars and their creators, the endlessly quoted script-writers of witty dialogues and easily imitated lines of banter and repartee became the leaders of the Dravidian movement and its various offshoots and soon it was they who, in their dual garb as politicians-saviours of the masses, dominated the Chennai skyline.

With so much competition, the master painters of these billboards

borrowed their techniques from many different sources. Their images owed as much to Ravi Varma and his favourite portraits of Indian womanhood in all her pan-Indian yet also Europeanised glory and the Impressionists as to more traditional Indian sources depicting the various *rasas* or moods laid down in the canons of dance and theatre. So it was that a film savvy crowd walking beneath these gigantic billboards could easily assess the gamut of emotions being presented to them by just registering the main colours – red for passion, purple and black for evil, golden yellow for goodness and, of course, pink for the hero and heroine – no matter what the Dravidians' truth to skin tones might be.

Not only did this coarsen the visual language, the type of reality that these painted vistas created in the public mind – of gardens filled with variegated flowers, with a small Japanese style wooden bridge across a pond filled with lotus blooms, a snow clad Mt. Fujiyama perhaps at the back or brilliant sunrises (many of them carrying not-so-hidden symbols denoting the party in power) – became the standard. These very same dream landscapes are now sold as laminated posters or mounted works of 'art' that are hung inside most homes to serve as indication of the person's individuality. If the Ravi Varma prints of the goddess of good fortune still dominate the more public areas of commerce and prosperity such as the entrance to a home or office, the framed pieces of chocolate box scenery showing nature's bounty fulfil their complementary role inside the private office, doctor's den, or living room. As though to underline their importance, most television serials recreate homes that have the same stereotypical landscapes on their walls.

Is it a surprise then that the Tamil Nadu artist finds himself in such splendid isolation? Despite such a monumental neglect, there is still much to rejoice however. There are many instances of individuals fighting back, indeed even rejoicing in their solitude. There are sculptors like S. Swaminathan who works using large blocks of granite that he chisels in rough chunks as though in homage to the great monuments of the past; or Raj Thiagarajan, an industrialist turned sculptor in his spare time, who fashions small pieces of plasticine into minimalist forms that are imbued with primitive strength after they have been chiselled and polished by a group of traditional stone sculptors; A. Balasubramanian who works in 3-dimensional compositions as large and lifesize as himself (since they are plaster casts that he's taken of himself) and which have already earned him wide acclaim; or S. Dinakar Sundar who works on the specially treated leaves of lotus flowers; Jacob Jeburaj and B.O. Sailesh from Cholamandal, who create installations and work at different locales and make use of a wide variety of materials; or P.G. Dinesh a young artist from Kerala, who lived at Cholamandal for some time, whose feline series and recent box-like compositions show a sense of defiance in the face of neglect.

They may appear timid at first. They may find it difficult to speak in perfect English sometimes, though they have mastered the art of communication having travelled to the outside world. They may not project the glory of their national or regional affiliation or make special claims for an identity that might give them a fleeting sense of belonging. They may not create an art movement. Nonetheless, they are filled with a determination to forge ahead creating their own reality out of their fractured heritage.

The music season

S R I R A M V

THE Music Season has its origins steeped in history. From time immemorial, the month of Margazhi (December/January) has been considered particularly sacred, as Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita states that among these months he exists as Dhanur masa, which is the Sanskrit equivalent.

Not surprisingly, it has been the practice among temples in Tamil Nadu to offer special worship to the deities during the month. No weddings are conducted during this period and no material transactions are undertaken by the orthodox as they believe that all of their waking moments are to be spent in the contemplation of the divine. Among the Vaishnavites this month is held in great reverence, for it was when Andal, the only lady Azhwar (12 divine saints), composed 30 verses on Lord Vishnu called the

Tiruppavai. The Vaikunta Ekadasi falls around the middle of this month and the verses of Andal and other Azhwars are sung on all days. The Saivaites celebrate the Ardra Darshanam when the asterism Tiruvadarai is in the ascendant. On that day, Lord Nataraja is said to have danced for the pleasure of his devotees, Patanjali and Vyaghrapada.

Music and dance can thus be said to be have religious sanction during this month. However, it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that the season as we know it today became crystallised. With the decline of the Tanjore court from 1799 and the death of Tipu Sultan the same year, Madras emerged as the new centre of power. It attracted businessmen such as the Nattukottai Chettiyars and the Komutti and Beri Chettis who all settled in Black Town (now called George Town). The Mudaliars followed suit. Brahmins, both Telugu and Tamizh speaking from Tanjore and Tirunelveli moved in, attracted by better employment prospects. The establishment of the High Court in the 1860s, created a new breed; the lawyers, who were to dominate the city for over a hundred years. Landowners and royalty followed suit. All these people were patrons of music and soon Madras became known as the musical capital.

In 1927, the Congress party session was to be held in the city. Foremost amongst its organisers was S. Satyamurthy, the famed lawyer, theatre actor, orator and freedom fighter. Given his friendship with the musical fraternity, he pressed for the organising of an All India Music Conference to coincide with the party session. This was agreed and the conference and exhibition of musical instruments was held at the Spur Tank, Madras, beginning from 24 December 1927. Concerts were held at a *pandal*

erected in the Spur Tank and conference deliberations were held at the Museum Theatre.

During the discussions it was proposed that an academy for music be set up in the city. Thus came about the Music Academy, which was incorporated on 22 January 1928, with U. Rama Rau (noted physician and Chairman of the Legislative Assembly, Madras) as President. The Academy was formally inaugurated on 18 August 1928 by Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Ayyar at the YMCA Buildings, Esplanade. The Academy began holding the occasional concert and it was during its first annual conference in 1929 that it was decided that a week long music festival be held to coincide with Christmas week. The logic was sound. The courts were closed during that period and the sahibs were having several rounds of merrymaking. The native society leaders were at a loose end and this gave them something to do.

The Music Academy, however, came to be dominated by the Tamizh Brahmin lobby and the Andhra element decided to set up the Indian Fine Arts Society in the mid-1930s. Both sabhas organised music programmes in December and both operated from the then cultural hub, North Madras or George Town. By then Mylapore was fast emerging as a choice residential area and music began gravitating to it. The Academy began a long journey south, holding its conferences sequentially at the Senate House (east Madras), Royapettah (south centre) and finally Mylapore (south) where it functioned for many years from the Rasika Ranjani Sabha premises and its surroundings before moving into its present building in 1962.

In 1941, the Justice Party, the prevailing anti-Brahmin sentiment and, above all, arise in awareness of the beauties of the Tamizh language saw

the birth of the Tamizh Isai Sangam. This was the third sabha of consequence and its decision to hold music programmes during Christmas week led to a raging debate in *The Kalki* and other papers as to the viability of three sabhas existing in the city. Then in 1945 came the Tyaga Brahma Gana Sabha (Vani Mahal) to cater to the residents of T. Nagar. By the early 1950s, came the Mylapore Fine Arts Club and the Sri Krishna Gana Sabha. It was, however, in the 1970s that the sabha boom actually happened, resulting in the situation as we know of it now with 70 odd sabhas organising over 2500 programmes spanning six weeks.

The music season usually kicks off by the last week of November, with a few small sabhas beginning their programmes earlier than others. Many of the city sabhas do not have premises of their own and consequently they need to plan their programmes in advance of the biggies in order to utilise available venues. For instance, the Kartik Fine Arts begins its programmes on December 1 at the spacious Narada Gana Sabha venue, where it continues till the 15th. That is when the Narada Gana Sabha begins its own programmes and so the Kartik Fine Arts moves to the RR Sabha premises. By the 21st, the RR Sabha begins its own programmes and so the Kartik Fine Arts moves to Anna Nagar where it hosts a series of Tamizh based music concerts at a college. The Kartik Fine Arts operates out of four different locations successively.

The big sabhas and many of the older established ones either have premises of their own or long standing rented venues and therefore do not suffer from this problem. Many of the fledgling sabhas simply operate out of the nearest *kalyana mantapam* (marriage hall), hotel or school premises. These are not built with acoustics in

mind and hearing music in such places can be nothing short of torture.

The first week of December sees the influx of Indians from abroad. Earlier such visitors had to persevere stay with relatives and friends, with the New Woodlands Hotel being the only lodging nearby. Now there is a proliferation of hotels and paying guest accommodation, the latter offered by parents with children living abroad and whose flats are much larger than what they really require. The Woodlands continues to operate at full capacity nevertheless.

It is quite simple to spot the NRI among the crowd of local attendees. The NRI typically clutches a mineral water bottle, has a handycam (which he/she surreptitiously uses to record concerts till noticed), has a concert and song guide in hand and sports ethnic clothes (saree/dhoti) which do not wear well. They also have repetitive tales to tell of how they hosted a musician when he/she came to perform at Milwaukee or Chatanooga and based on this tenuous connection will try and meet up with the musician once again and re-establish contact. The poor musician, no doubt having accepted a three month overseas tour, will oblige, in anticipation of some much longed for *tayir sadam* in the US.

For the musicians the season begins looming large even by the middle of August when they are approached by sabhas and booked for concerts. Fans keep a tab on each artiste's popularity by counting the number of performances during the season. If an artiste suddenly drops down in the concert count from the previous year, the rumour mills begin to work overtime. Voice failure, miscarriage, divorce—all these are speculated on and analysed.

Overseas sabhas too keep a track of performances during the season and overseas tours are often decided on

this basis. All this puts pressure on the artistes and many are forced to accept more concerts than their stamina permits. There are only a few who set a firm limit on the number of performances. But that requires great courage. Most artistes prefer to run the risk of cancelling concerts at the last minute rather than not accept them at all.

Next comes the awards fever. Sabhas begin announcing their awards by the middle of September. Carnatic music has never been free from awards, but it was only in 1942 that the Music Academy decided to award the President of its annual conference the title of Sangita Kalanidhi. The Indian Fine Arts Society followed suit with its Sangita Kala Shikhamani. Today we have over seventy awards given during the season by sabhas big and small. In terms of money, they mean little, but artistes consider them as appendages to personal prestige and accept them regardless. It is not a surprise to see an artiste receiving the Sangita Kalanidhi, also receive an obscure award with a cash component of Rs 1000 from a two year old sabha operating out of a kalyana mandapam.

By mid-December, the season is in full swing with the Music Academy and its close parallel the Narada Gana Sabha having begun their festivals. Artistes and audiences have a tough time keeping track of various concert dates and programmes. The smaller sabhas stick to evening concerts by prominent artistes. The bigger ones have full day programmes. Mornings are devoted to lecture demonstrations, afternoon concerts are free and showcase young talent, while evening concerts are ticketed and feature the big stars.

The vernacular and English newspapers and periodicals bring out

special supplements on Carnatic music, with profiles of artistes past and present. Websites devoted to music provide schedules online which are used by the tech savvy. All sabhas bring out booklets comprising their own schedules, with the Academy's being a glossy affair (but of late full of factual mistakes and printers devils). Kannan's *Season Comprehensive Guide* is an integral part of the season. Brought out single-handedly in earlier years by a bank official, it now receives sponsorship, but the effort remains Kannan's own. It lists concerts by dates, venue and artistes. There are many reference books of songs that help lay audiences identify *ragas*, *talas* and composer names. The problem arises when songs in different ragas have the same opening lines and that is when the knowledgeable person (who is sitting in the next seat, with a faintly superior air) comes in useful.

Canteen facilities are a major attraction. Four sabhas have established themselves on the strength of their culinary and musical fare. These are the Music Academy, the Narada Gana Sabha, the Mylapore Fine Arts Club and the Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha. The last named, around 103 years old, was however a late entrant to the December season. In the old days, Krishnamurthy of the Music Academy canteen was a treasure whose Kashi halwa was relished by many. The chef supreme at the Music Academy now is 'Mountbatten' Mani. He acquired this prefix after being reportedly praised by the Viceroy himself during a lunch at the Raj Bhavan, Madras. Mount Mani paid Rs 1.30 lakh for bagging the contract at the Academy this season.

He is well patronised by music lovers and others who simply came to have a meal or snack. But Mount Mani

pales in comparison to what three brothers have been upto in the other sabhas. Arusuvai Natarajan, the eldest, caters to the populace at the Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha and the banner that announces him as the chef is larger than the sabha's own. His brother Jayaraman holds sway at Narada Gana Sabha, while youngest brother Kannan operates from the Mylapore Fine Arts Club.

All three brothers have made the season a food festival in its own way. Natarajan specialises in full-scale meals while the others top the charts by way of snacks. It is a common sight to see artistes relaxing in these canteens after their performance, fawned upon by fans. Old timers remember with fondness such epicures as Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Dr S. Ramanathan and M.D. Ramanathan coming to the canteen and discussing matters musical and otherwise with those present. Some of the more fastidious are of the view that canteens dilute the importance of music, but a sabha without a canteen is perceived to be dull fare.

Music fans are themselves divided into three groups. There is one which is never satisfied with what is offered now and claims that with Semmangudi no more all that was good in music has passed on. Yet this group continues attending concerts, always hoping of hearing something that will recreate old memories. This group is, however, best avoided. The second follows a single idol (whoever that may be) from sabha to sabha. They will not countenance listening to any other artiste. The third is the one that really keeps the season going. With eclectic tastes and preferences, a growing knowledge and curiosity they throng the sabhas.

How do the artistes, having to cater to as many as 21 concerts in the

month, often to the same audience, manage to offer variety? A lot of planning is involved and several artistes learn new songs for the season in order to offer something new every time they sing. Yet the season does put them under a lot of pressure and it is only the most hardy and seasoned performers who are able to take December in their stride. In addition, the cool weather of Madras during the season causes a plethora of throat problems.

Waiting to catch the artiste at an unguarded moment and looking for an opportunity to pounce on them, are the critics who represent various dailies and periodicals. Each one has his or her own favourites whom they assiduously promote. The critics, often overburdened with too many concerts to attend, usually write the most perfunctory of accounts with little depth. Gone are the days of detailed analysis that Kalki or Aeolus (S.V. Seshadri) were capable of.

The electronic media with its mega serials offers tough competition to the season. 8.30 pm usually sees a thinning of audiences as they prefer to go home and watch the soaps. It is only the top two or three artistes and that too on a good day who are able to retain a full house till the end. Out of deference to changed times the concert duration has also been reduced from the earlier four hours to two and a half. A rather innovative series of programmes is the Margazhi Maha Utsav, the brainchild of a private production house. A series of concerts are held from 1st to 15th December at the Chettinad Vidyashram (among the best auditoriums in the city). These are open to all and generally attract record crowds. The concerts are recorded and telecast live over a private channel from the 15th to the 31st December. Sponsorships

have poured in and this could be the way of the future.

The season as we know it, is not a commercial success. Most sabhas, barring the top ten, are operated by fly by night operators. Despite heavy gate collections, artistes are fobbed off with a mere pittance. The prestige that the season has acquired, however, forces artistes to accept these terms in order to be simply seen (and heard). Sabhas largely thrive on sponsors who view the whole event as a charity. The other commercial interests of the city such as hotels and shopping malls do not participate in the season, thereby preventing it from acquiring a broader appeal.

The government has remained indifferent, which according to many, is a positive thing. The city's infrastructure – transport, roads and accommodation – all come under severe pressure and this has only worsened over the years. The crying need is for buses to transport audiences to nodal points, but even this has not been thought off. Most sabhas were built during the days when there were few cars and these buildings have handkerchief size parking lots. The chaos in the surrounding areas during the programmes can only be imagined. The younger generation remains largely untouched and the season also has a Brahmin tag attached to it. Fortunately, music heritage walks, screening of vintage films and the music quiz have all somewhat increased the appeal of the season.

Yet it is that time of the year when Carnatic music makes a statement and manages to hold its own against television, cricket, cinema and other entertainment. Even if only once a year, it resurrects itself and stands out, testifying to the eternal nature of its appeal.

Two people, one industry

BARADWAJ RANGAN

TAMIL cinema has existed for over eight decades, and each of these decades has thrown up stalwarts in several fields. So it may appear strange to single out a film of the nineties made by a technocrat of the eighties – Mani Rathnam's *Iruvar* – as the work that defines Tamil cinema, as we've known it so far, as it is today, as it heads into the future.

Even if you agree that Rathnam is a sublime storyteller, a composer of poetry on celluloid, you could say he isn't the most original in terms of content. *Mouna Raagam* (A Silent Symphony), the film that put him on the map, was essentially a reworking of Mahendran's *Nenjathai Killaathey*, itself a silent symphony that emphasized mood over dialogue in telling the story of a woman (Suhasini, before she became Mrs. Mani Rathnam) who has to let go of a past love in order to come to terms with her present husband. With poems on celluloid that include *Mullum Malarum*, *Metti*,

Poottaadha Poottukkal and, especially, *Udhiri Pookkal*, Mahendran proved himself a sublime storyteller almost a decade before Rathnam.

Even if you agree that Rathnam is a genius with form, you could say that he isn't the first who made stylish flourishes a hallmark of his ventures. There was, for instance, C. V. Sridhar in the sixties who, right from his directorial debut with *Kalyana Parisu* – the box-office bullseye that combined the eternal love triangle with the timeless comedy of Thangavelu – made a name for himself as a purveyor of classy, sophisticated products. A *Then Nilavu* or a *Nenjil Or Aalayam* or a *Kaadhalikka Neramillai*, Sridhar films all, in those days was considered the work of a genius with form.

Even if you agree that Rathnam has a gift for mining drama out of controversial, never-before-seen subjects, you could say there have been others with similar penchant for going into uncharted territories. S. Balaji

chandar, in the fifties, made the first Tamil movie without songs or dances – *Andha Naal*, a Roshomon-like examination of truth that dared to portray Sivaji Ganesan as an anti-hero, as a traitor who sold his country's secrets to the enemy.

Later, another similarly-named director, K. Balachander, broke rules and expectations – right from *Neer Kunizhi* (his debut, about the ephemeral nature of life) to *Arangetram* (about a Brahmin woman taking to prostitution to support her family), an *Aboorva Raagangal* (a love quadrangle involving two parents and their children) and *Thanneer Thanneer* (an indictment of the political scenario that couldn't even bring water to a parched village in Tamil Nadu) to *Vaaname Ellai* (about a group of youngsters who make a suicide pact).

Yes, for all of Rathnam's terrific talent with form and themes, he wasn't exactly a pioneer in these areas. More precisely, there were others before him who, for their time, accomplished many of the feats we associate with Rathnam today.

Yet, I pick him as the representative of Tamil cinema simply because of what befell him – a stroke of serendipity that placed him at the right place at the right time. He happened to be there when the quality of most mainstream movie-making in Tamil was abysmal, when the time was ripe for someone to step in and herald a change. He happened to be around when fresh talents like cinematographer P.C. Sreeram – whose interest in the offbeat was evident in his participation in doomed ventures like *Meendum Oru Kaadhal Kadhai*, and who shot Rathnam's *Nayakan*, *Thirudaa Thirudaa* and *Alai Paayuthey*, among others – were available for like-minded filmmakers to collaborate with. Most importantly, he happened to be there when India

was opening up in terms of awareness through increased and improved communications, when good films from India were beginning to be appreciated throughout the country and abroad.

Saying that Rathnam was simply at the right place at the right time isn't an effort to run down his genius; it's simply recognizing that had he come on to the stage even a few years before he actually did, he would have probably ended up like a Mahendran or a Balu Mahendra, treasured by the Tamils but unknown elsewhere. None of the avant-garde efforts before Rathnam's time – Rudraiah's *Aval Appadithaan*, for instance – managed much awareness. Nor did any of the filmmakers from other regions – Karnataka's Girish Kasaravalli or Kerala's Adoor Gopalakrishnan – ever manage Rathnam's level of popularity. In fact, it wouldn't be much of a stretch to say that were it not for Rathnam and his *Roja*, which spanned the proverbial Kashmir to Kanyakumari both in terms of its setting and its acceptance by audiences, we wouldn't even be talking about Tamil cinema on an all-India level today.

The masses of Tamil Nadu may not always line up for Rathnam's fare – it's always the action-cum-sentiment packed *masala* entertainers that make the big bucks – but his is the name synonymous with Tamil cinema outside of Tamil Nadu, outside of India, and his underrated, underperforming *Iruvar* is a mirror of the many things Tamil cinema has been about, is about, and probably will be about.

Iruvar is the story of aspiring actor Anandan (Mohanlal) and writer Tamizhchelvan (Prakash Raj) who become friends and then fall apart. The aspiring actor, the writer and the key female character (played by Aishwarya Rai) are based, respectively,

on M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalithaa – so the film is, first and foremost, a marriage of cinema and politics, much like Tamil cinema, much like Tamil Nadu itself.

Tamil movies have always had strong ties to politics – the thirties *Thyagaboomi* which wove real-life footage of Mahatma Gandhi into its story of a Brahmin priest espousing Gandhian ideals like the eradication of untouchability, the fifties *Parasakthi* that brimmed with Karunanidhi's fiery anti-Brahmin and pro-Dravidian rhetoric, *Yezhavathu Manidhan* (that used Bharatiyaar poetry to underscore its political themes) and *Kann Sivandhaal Mann Sivakkum*, even the routine masala fare today that frequently features politicians as corrupt villains. The state too began its affair with films when K.B. Sundarambal became the first star to be nominated to the Madras Legislative Council, and the government has, at different times, been headed by screenwriters (C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi) and actors (MGR, J. Jayalalithaa, V.N. Janaki).

Iruvar means duo – The Duo is what it was called in film festivals – and the story is dominated by two people, the MGR figure and the Karunanidhi figure. Tamil cinema itself has, for the longest time, embraced the concept of pairs. In the movie, Tamizhchelvan, with his interest in poetry, comes across as the more classy person, while Anandan's appeal is more directly to the masses, and this demarcation was shared by MGR in real life with Sivaji Ganesan, the other hero that constituted the duo that ruled Tamil filmdom for decades.

The latter, who began his career with *Parasakthi*, rose to become the sort of classy actor who could (and would) play anything from historical

(*Veerapandiya Kattabomman*, *Kappalottiya Tamizhan*) mythological (*Thiruvilayaadal*, *Saraswathy Sabadham*) social melodramas (*Motor Sundaram Pillai*, *Uyarndha Manidhan*, *Vietnaam Veedu*) to just about everything else. MGR, on the other hand, went after the masses, carefully preserving his on-screen image of the good samaritan who defended those who couldn't defend themselves—the Robin Hood re-dos like *Malaikallan*, quasi-historicals like *Naadodhi Mannan*, or later films tellingly named *Thozhilaali* (worker) and *Rickshawkaaran* (rickshaw-puller). After the MGR-Sivaji duo, of course, came the rule of another twosome, the classy Kamal Haasan and the massy Rajnikanth, whose roles often project an MGR-like saviour of society and whose MGR-like rumblings about politics have become increasingly loud.

Iruvar details a slice of Tamil Nadu politics that's clear only to a people who have been weaned on the MGR-Karunanidhi-Jayalalithaa interplay in real life, and hence harks back to a time when Tamil cinema was regional to the core. The film does not translate well across cultures, unlike director A. Bhimsingh's hugely successful 'Pa' series of family dramas—*Paavamannippu*, *Paalum Pazhamum*, *Padiththaal Mattum Podhuma*, *Paarthaal Pasi Theerum*—which were Tamilian in flavour but lent themselves to translation and interpretation into other languages and cultures.

Many of the early landmarks of Tamil cinema—*Poompuhar* (based on *Silappadhikaaram*, the ancient gem of Tamil literature by Ilango Adigal), S.S. Vaasan's *Mangamma Sabadham* and *Avvaiyaar*, Sivaji Ganesan's historicals and mythologicals—were, like *Iruvar*, unique to the region, as are

later works like Kamal Haasan's *Thevar Magan* (which was set in an all-too-generic North Indian village in its remake *Viraasat*) or what his upcoming *Virumaandi* promises to be.

Iruvar appears influenced by other sources just as Tamil cinema has frequently been. Aishwarya Rai first plays the short-lived wife of Anandan, then portrays a starlet who floors him because she looks exactly like the wife, and Anandan's obsessive attachment to her seems very much like James Stewart's obsession for the second Kim Novak (who looks exactly like the first Kim Novak character) in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. This sort of appropriation isn't particularly Tamilian—it's Indian—but the remakes sometimes redeem themselves with other virtues, like how *Chase a Crooked Shadow* became the stylish musical bonanza *Pudhiya Paravai*.

The title of *Iruvar* is itself reminiscent of AVM's *Naam Iruvar*—a patriotic, if not exactly political, film of the forties whose success did much to veer Tamil cinema away from the mythologicals and the historicals into social themes. Before *Naam Iruvar*, save the odd *Sevasadanam* or *Thyagabhoomi*, most movies—*Keechaka Vadham* (the first Tamil silent film), *Meenakshi Kalyaanam*, *Gajendra Moksham*, *Kalidas* (the first Tamil talkie)—were based on epics and myths. Only later did the movies—from C.N. Annadurai's *Velaikkaari* to Durai's *Pasi* (shot amidst the slums of Madras) to Balu Mahendra's *Veedu*—begin reflecting the world around. This transition can be glimpsed in *Iruvar*, in the segments that show the shooting of Anandan's films which progress from *raja-rani* milieus to contemporary society.

Iruvar has a breathtaking style that brings to mind Tamil cinema, both

old and new. The film is a passage through time, and an early song sequence showing Anandan—this name is itself that of a small-time hero of the fifties and the sixties who starred in the likes of *Vijayapuri Veeran* and *Veerathirumagan*—romancing his lady is shot in black and white, with the elaborately ornamental wipes found in films of the *Ambikapathi* period. Vairamuthu's lyrics here incorporate suitably chaste Tamil words, A.R. Rahman's heavily Carnatic style music appropriates the characteristics of early composers like G. Ramanathan and S.V. Venkataraman, and this song is sung by Unnikrishnan and Bombay Jayashree. (While the former's sweetly melodic voice isn't exactly a fit with the robust male timbres of the time, say, that of M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, the latter suitably approximates the heavy voice of a P. Leela or an M.L. Vasanthakumari.)

The setting of *Iruvar* then changes to the sixties and we see studio sets, a heroine imitating Saroja Devi's curvaceous dance moves, a tune befitting the Viswanathan-Ramamurthy era, and a soprano voice like that of P. Sushila. The vocal characteristics of T.M. Soundararajan, the star male playback singer of this period, are imbibed for the number *aayirathil naan oruvan*—a nod to *Aayirathil Oruvan*, an MGR hit—and the lyrics here go *ini ezhugnaayiru ezhuga indha irul koottangal ozhiga*, a reference to the Rising Sun (the DMK party's symbol to this day) dispelling the surrounding darkness.

We then move to the modern period, expecting a song in the style of Ilayaraja, but what we get is a jazz-era piece that would fit right into *The Cotton Club*, and this incongruousness is also something that's a part of Tamil cinema, where set pieces are

simply about entertainment, without much regard to period detail. What's important, however, is that each of these time periods and the corresponding sequences are stunningly shot and beautifully designed. This is very much true of today's Tamil cinema – even the most routine potboiler is technically top-notch, and technicians from the industry are much in demand all over India.

Iruvar is unforgettable for the bigness of its canvas – from desert ranges to waterfalls, from elaborate sets that recreate a period to huge contemporary buildings that serve as the backdrop for political action. Tamil, and indeed Indian, cinema has always been larger than life, but bigness – not just in terms of remuneration, like the unheard-of one lakh rupees that was paid to get theatre star K.B. Sundarambal to do *Nandanar*, but in terms of scale – has also been a part of the industry right from the films of S.S. Vaasan, the Cecil B. De Mille of India.

Vaasan's Gemini Studios – the one with the famous logo of the twins blowing bugles – churned out massive-scale entertainments like *Balanaagamma*, *Aboorva Sagotharargal*, *Vanjikottai Vaaliban*, and especially *Chandralekha*, with its climactic drum dance featuring hundreds of extras. The sixties saw the slew of gargantuan mythologicals and historicals with technicolour that sometimes hurt the eye, the eighties saw the films of T. Rajendar, a multi-tasking maverick whose grandiose sets were often major attractions, and today, a Shankar is known for his large-scale successes filled with special effects.

Iruvar stars Tabu and Aishwarya Rai, both actresses of fair complexion who do not know a word of Tamil. (The two would co-star again in Rajeev Menon's *Kandukondain Kandukon-*

dain.) This occasionally happened earlier, when Radha Saluja appeared in a series of hits opposite MGR or when Bharatiraja tried to palm off the *pucca-Punjabi-looking* Rati Agnihotri as a Tamil Nadu villager in *Pudhiya Vaarpugal*, but it's after Khushboo stormed Chennai and blazed a trail of success that northern heroines (Simran, Jyothika, Kiran) have become a must in Tamil films.

The heroes of *Iruvar*, interestingly, aren't stars but actors, which is again something occasionally found in Tamil cinema. The male stars, the top heroes, are usually worshipped like Gods, but there has always been a place for unconventional leads, like Vijayan in the seventies, who appeared in *Udhiri Pookkal* and *Niram Maaraadha Pookkal*.

Iruvar reflects realism – the Malayali flavour of Mohanlal's Tamil underscored the fact that MGR himself was a Malayali – and this is something Tamil cinema has increasingly embraced, more so since the entry of Bharatiraja. The latter, with his debut in *16 Vayadhinile*, moved films out of the studios and into villages to bring rustic sights and sounds like never before. He also tackled several real issues – *Vedham Pudhidhu* dealt with the caste system, *Pudhumai Penn* was about the position of women in society – and earlier creators like Jayakanthan have explored real (as opposed to melodramatic) relationships in films like *Sila Nerangalil Sila Manidhargal*.

Another aspect of the realism in *Iruvar* is found in the absence of a separate comedy track, and today even the odd commercial effort like *Kaakha Kaakha* or *Pithamagan* has done away with the intended-for-laughs insertions that have been integral to Tamil cinema from the days of N.S. Krishnan and T.A. Madhuram.

Most mainstream movies, of course, still have comedy tracks, but even there you have funny men, like the socially responsible Vivek, who try to infuse some semblance of reality into their wisecracks.

Iruvar was a good film that met with a pathetic response at the box office, a phenomenon all too true of Tamil cinema. Anything that's too different is usually rejected by the masses, as Kamal Haasan recently discovered with *Anbe Sivam* and Mani Rathnam himself found with his last release *Kannathil Muthamittaal*.

However, *Iruvar* won other wars, with invitations to film festivals around the world – like the 51st Locarno International Film Festival 1998 – much like *Nayakan* was screened at Toronto. Quality Tamil cinema that doesn't work locally today often finds fame elsewhere – *Hey Ram*, for instance, became part of a course on Indian cinema at the University of Iowa.

Iruvar, finally, represents something positive – the ambition of current Tamil cinema. Tamil films have always been ambitious, but mostly in terms of scope and scale. Today, the ambition is more about themes, about risks. A director like Bala is not only able to get away with his utterly morbid scenarios in *Sethu*, *Nandha* and *Pithamagan*, he also lands top heroes like Vikram and Surya to participate in them. Mani Rathnam himself, after all-out commercial fare like *Agni Natchatiram* and *Thirudaa Thirudaa*, has become more artistically ambitious with the much-lauded likes of *Bombay* and *Kannathil Muthamittaal*.

Tamil cinema will always remain slave to the box office, but even in the midst of mere masala, there is enough scope for art and craft, which is what is exemplified by Mani Rathnam and his *Iruvar*.

Turtles and antelopes

S. THEODORE BASKARAN

THE year, 1965. The sun had gone down and an early moon dimly lit the Santhome beach in Madras. There were no one else on the beach. Thilaka and I were sitting there wondering if it was time to leave when we heard the sound of sand being shovelled. Turning back we saw behind us what appeared to be a dark mound a few metres away. It took only a few seconds to recognize the shovelling movement of the flippers of a sea turtle. Olive Ridley to be specific. We got up and squatted close watching it prepare its nest. That was one of my early introductions to the wildlife of Chennai.

Only a few cities are as blessed as Chennai is with varied geographical features – rivers, sea front, hills, lakes, backwaters, swamps and an estuary. And few have squandered such a heritage as we have done in a frenzied and unbalanced urbanization.

When the British traders began building a fort near the village Madarasapatinam in 1639, thereby taking the first step towards founding the city of Madras, the area was replete with wildlife. Marshes stretched along the seacoast. The British soldiers often set out of the fort to shoot waterfowl that congregated in the marshes. The Quibble Island, with its expanses of swamp and marshes attracting hordes of waterfowl like snipe and curlews, was a favourite hunting ground for the British. Along the coast were vast areas of tropical dry evergreen forest in which antelopes roamed. Two rivers, the Adyar and the Coovum, mean-

dered close by. And there was this long sea front that the British artistes celebrated through their etchings. The landscape was dotted with lakes of varied sizes. Decades later, when the British officers were engaged in land survey in 1800, they reported sighting tigers in Vandalur hills, just 40 km from the fort.

The picture we have now is very different. A modern factory, sprawling under the shadow of Vandalur hills, is busy producing cars and the nearest spot where tigers can be found is the Mudumalai sanctuary, 600 km away, where a mere twenty-five lead a precarious existence. The lakes survive only as names of townships. Most of the tidal mud flats and creeks have been reclaimed by land hungry urbanites and converted into colonies such as Foreshore estate. The beach has been vandalized and buildings have come up close to the sea. The rivers have been defiled beyond recognition and the hills blasted out of shape to produce concrete. The estuary has been encroached upon and constricted out of its distinctiveness as a habitat.

But a patch of coastal scrub jungle, a mere 271 ha, has survived, albeit in a degenerate form and is now a national park. In 1947 it was a 400 ha expanse but parts of this prime forest was allotted to various institutions and over the years it has shrunk to what it is now. The Guindy Deer Park is a link with the ecological past of the city and provides an idea of the heritage lost. This is one of the last holds of the endangered antelope that is exclusive to India, the blackbuck. It is the fastest animal in India, capable of running fifteen kilometres at a stretch keeping an

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average of 70 km/h and at times peaking at an astonishing 90 km/h. Once plentiful in the plains, the blackbuck is now seen only in a few protected areas like the Point Calimere Sanctuary in Nagapatinam district and in the Then-gumarada forests in Erode district.

The park is also home to spotted deer but these are not endemic to the jungle; they have been introduced and in time have flourished. The park has quite a few other mammals such as the jackal, Indian hare and monitor lizard. It is also home to a variety of reptiles, including the star tortoise. More than a hundred varieties of birds, migrant and residents, can be spotted in the park. Among the noteworthy are the green-billed malkoha, a resident cuckoo that builds its own nest and the forest wagtail, a migrant bird of the size of a sparrow with zebra markings on its grey body. As a sanctuary for wild animals and as a laboratory for researchers, the importance of this park is increasingly being recognized.

In the early 1970s, enthused by the initial waves of conservation efforts, a group of us set out to prepare a checklist of birds of the Guindy Deer Park. The red-winged cuckoo, a migrant that visits the wooded part of the city, is easily spotted. It breeds in North East India and migrates south. My friend and fellow twitcher 10-volume Narayanaswamy recorded the presence of this cuckoo in Guindy and surprised even a seasoned birder like M. Krishnan. You might wonder about the prefix to his name. When the other birders barely managed to possess a copy of Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds*, Narayanaswamy was the proud owner of all the 10 volumes of the newly released *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan* by Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley. Whence the identity.

The Guindy Park also played a crucial role in conservation education.

It was here that quite a few wildlife enthusiasts honed their concern, began their life-long involvement with wildlife and now contribute to the cause of conservation in India. R. Sukumar, Chairman of Asian Elephant Specialist group of IUCN, Shantharam who gave up a career as a chartered accountant to become an ornithologist and Ravi Chellam, India's lion man, now with the UNDP, are some of the names I can think of.

Though most of the swampy areas of the city have given way to residential colonies, the Adyar estuary survived, till recently. An estuary, where the fresh water of the river meets the brackish water of the sea, is a unique and fragile ecosystem, representing a habitat between the land and the sea. It presents a transitional condition that is never static. The important feature of this environment is the constant change of mixture of salt and freshwater. It is dominated by fine sedimentary material, taken into the estuary by the tidal flow and this forms the mud flats. The ebb and flow of the tidal currents work on the soil and make it a nursery of many aquatic creatures. During low tide, a vast area of the riverbed is bared and a host of wading birds feed on the tiny crabs and other small creatures.

In the migratory season, waterfowl of different varieties, thousands of sandpipers and shanks, long-legged waders, flock to this feeding ground. The little stint, a tiny, winter visitor, comes all the way from Eastern Europe and remains till the end of March. The flamingos that used to visit the estuary have their breeding grounds in the Rann of Kutch. They can also be seen in Thadai lake on the outskirts of the city. Rare plants like mangroves bordered the estuary. In fact, some remnants of these mangroves can still be seen on the Theosophical Society side.

The Theosophical Society campus sustains a considerable bird population. The variety of trees, both indigenous and exotic (including the two baobab trees) attracts migrants and resident birds. On my evening walks, in addition to celebrities like paradise flycatchers, I have sighted star-tortoise moving unhurriedly across the path. The howl of jackals after sunset seems to celebrate the protection they enjoy on the campus.

While developing the city, the citizens and administration seem to have completely ignored the presence of the sea front. Buildings have been erected too close to the sea and encroachments of various size have been allowed to grow. Long stretches of the beach are virtual latrines. The school of dolphins that shows up near the coast spasmodically goes unnoticed. Two kinds of dolphins can easily be sighted in the sea off Chennai: the bottle-nosed dolphin and the hump-backed. Madras Yacht Club members tell me that schools of the latter variety are seen more often around Chennai. Though there has been no record of whale sighting in recent years, in 1890 a sperm whale was washed ashore on the coast of Chennai, and the skull is on display in the Madras museum. The occasional whale shark that gets beached and appears as news item is an indication of what the sea contains in the shape of life forms.

It is only in recent decades that the need to conserve and care for our wildlife heritage has been articulated in Madras city. In the forties and fifties, M. Krishnan, one of the early conservationists, was ploughing a lonely furrow by writing on wildlife, first in Tamil and later prolifically in English. The burden of his song was that we should recognize animals, birds, rivers and hills as our heritage. His column Southern Diary in *The Illustrated*

Weekly often carried pieces on the wildlife of the city. He inspired many wildlife enthusiasts. Harry Miller, writing in *The Indian Express* drew people's attention to reptiles and birds and kindled the light in many budding wildlife photographers.

The founding of the Snake Park in Chennai in 1969, largely due to the efforts of Romulus Whitaker, with assistance from the World Wildlife Fund, was a landmark in the conservation movement in this part of the country. Ignorance about snakes, compounded by superstition, destruction of their habitats and a boom in the snake-skin industry has spelt disaster for the reptiles. In the late 1950s, one tannery near Madras was curing five to ten thousands snake skins daily. In addition to the legal steps taken by the government, protection also came in the form of a public conscious of wildlife. A key effort of the snake park was to educate the public and to encourage research on Indian herptofauna. In this task, the services of the Irula tribals were harnessed and their traditional knowledge put into use in conservation work. More important, the park became a training ground for youngsters interested in wildlife and some of them, such as Shekhar Dattatri who grew to be a wildlife filmmaker and Satish Bhaskar who blossomed into an expert on turtles made a career of their interest.

The surge of enthusiasm for wildlife conservation that swept the country in the early seventies had its impact on Chennai. In 1970, Romulus Whitaker, then managing the Madras Snake Park, was living by the sea and observed the decimation that the sea turtles were being subjected to. Along with Satish Bhaskar and Jean Delouche, he initiated steps to save the turtles. With a group of volunteers, he organized what came to be known as 'turtle walks'. During nesting season volun-

teers walked along the beach at night covering the area from Marina to Kalpakkam and collected the eggs.

According to their estimate about 14,000 Olive Ridley turtles came to the Chennai beaches for nesting. Whitaker and his team persuaded National and Grindlays Bank to provide a space in Injambakam, where a makeshift hatchery was set up and the eggs were buried under sand to hatch. In 1982, the WWF took up and continued the hatchery programme. Soon the Forest Department stepped in and set up three more hatcheries. Whitaker demonstrated what could be done with very little resource and a strong belief in the cause. He was subsequently to prove the same point with regard to crocodiles. Later, Chandy Abraham and Karthik Shankar formed the Students' Sea Turtle Conservation Network and carried on the work. Now, Murugavel of the Trust for Restoration of Ecology and Environment (TREE) and other volunteers continue turtle walks. In addition to helping the turtles, these walks continue to win new converts to the cause of conservation in Chennai.

In 1978, about 16 wildlife enthusiasts of the city led by Vivek Kunte, joined and formed the Madras Naturalist Society. To begin with there were two concerns that brought them together: one was the Adyar estuary and the other, the Guindy Deer Park. One of their first activities was to carry out a census of the blackbuck and chital population of the park. In 1980, the members took Salim Ali to the estuary to give him an idea of its bird wealth. In 1982, a survey of the Madras beach from Ennore to Covalam was done. Its quarterly journal *Blackbuck*, begun in 1983, has established itself as a reputed publication providing a forum for many non-professionals to document their observations on wildlife. With

300 members, of whom 180 are for life, the MNS has the capability to serve as an enlightened voice for the city's natural heritage.

Even now, in the new millennium, there are some pockets of greenery in the city that serve as wildlife habitats – the Theosophical Society, the Indian Institute of Technology, Anna University, the museum and Women's Christian College. In addition to the trees there, these 'green spaces' sustain a variety of birds like the golden backed woodpecker and spotted owlets; there are also mammals – toddy cat, squirrels, flying foxes and mongooses. Small ponds inside the city attract pond herons and the white-breasted kingfisher. Inside the IIT Madras campus is a roosting site for open-bill storks and white ibis. A few years ago I lived in a house on Commander-in-Chief road where a family of mongooses were regular visitors to our garden.

One threat to wildlife in the city is the growing population of stray dogs. The corporation has stopped its programme of elimination of strays and they have multiplied in the thousands. In the Guindy Deer Park and the IIT campus, they prey on the fawns of chital and blackbuck, steeply bringing down their numbers. Along the beach, the strays smell out turtle nests and feed on the eggs. This problem is yet to be addressed.

Though Chennai appears to be a city of trees from the air, much of the tree cover has gone. The evergreen indigenous trees like the banyan, peepal, neem, mango, and pungamia, tamarind and wood apple can be seen only in some parts of the city. In recent decades we also observe a change in the kind of trees that are planted. Exotics, which are small in spread and weak in the trunk, are favoured. For instance, the gulmohar sheds its leaves

in summer, when we need shade most. Instead, there is need to propagate indigenous varieties such as neem and peepal. The people's obsession with coconut palms militates against providing a proper green cover. Though hardly anyone harvests coconuts from the trees planted in their houses, the tree remains popular. The concretizing of pavements has spelt death for the trees. The tree trunk is covered all around, as if it was a lamp post and eventually the tree dies. There has been no sustained tree-growing programme in the city.

But nothing is more symbolic of the utter disregard for wildlife heritage as the destruction of the Adyar estuary. Biologists point to the estuaries as the most productive natural habitats of the world. The food web here is complicated and so the area invites specialized feeders. It takes eons to shape an estuary and we have ruined it overnight by deciding to dredge it, preparatory to setting up a boathouse. If only the sanctuary had been given protection it would have attracted a lot more tourists – if that were the purpose – than a few boats will ever do. And we would have had a heritage intact.

The environmental degradation of Chennai is also indicated in many other ways. Water shortage is one. All the wetlands in the city have been reclaimed and the water resources neglected. The lakes at Nungambakkam and Vyasarpadi have been overwhelmed by urban sprawl. This process of destroying wetlands, our main life-support system, continues. The marshes near Foreshore Estate in Santhome are getting filled up. The latest in the list is Pallikaranai swamp, a vast stretch of marshy wetland adjoining Velacherry in South Madras, which is getting filled up with the garbage of the city. As wetlands and lakes shrink

inexorably, the water table falls drastically and subterranean aquifers get depleted.

The bird population, which is a good indicator of the ecological health of any area, has come down drastically. One sees less and less of them both in the ground and in the sky. In the seventies, in Besant Nagar, we used to watch a pair of white-bellied sea eagle soar along the sea front. The birders knew that the pair nested inside the Theosophical Society. They are no more to be seen.

Still, even today Chennai has a considerable bird population. We often sight the golden oriole in the gulmohar tree in our house. There are occasional white-headed babbler and drogues that visit us. The tailor-birds and bulbuls are always there. A crimson-throated barbet shows up sometimes. You would hear pied-wagtails perched on water tanks in the terrace of flat complexes. In the evenings we see batches of mynas fly overhead to their roosting spot for the night. Flocks of rose-ringed parakeets dash across as if they have just remembered an important appointment. The western sky grows deep pink and from their many roosting spots in the city come night herons, on leisurely wing bets, silhouetted against the crimson backdrop. They are flying towards their feeding ground for the night... the backwaters of Muttukadu? There they will feed till daybreak when the golden oriole starts calling from the Gulmohar tree, announcing another day.

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Curdrice cricket

V. RAMNARAYAN

NOT long ago, four Chennai cricketers were barred from playing any further games for the season, following unacceptably aggressive on-field behaviour during a league match. Their 'sledging' prowess would have put the worst excesses of the Australian Test team to shame. All four suspended players belonged to the fielding side, the umpire who reported the incident to the cricket association finding the opponents innocent of any misdemeanour. 'They were perhaps cleverer than those who got caught,' the cynics said. 'Chances are that they too mouthed obscenities, insulted the opposition, and questioned their parentage; only they did it out of the umpires' hearing, to go by the general trend of behaviour on our cricket grounds.'

What a far cry this scene is from Madras cricket of yore. Just to give you an idea of the kind of spirit that pervaded the game as it was played here in the fifties and sixties, even the seventies, let's join the action in the first ball of a limited over match back in the sixties. The new ball bowler K.S.S. Mani is known for movement and intelligent variation rather than speed. The batsman is R. Vijayaraghavan, an entertaining stroke-maker. To 'Viji', if a ball is there to be hit, it is meant to be hit, even if it is the first ball of a match. Mani's first delivery is an inswinging half volley, and Viji flicks it imperiously over square leg for six. The crowd is on its feet, but look at Mani's reaction. He runs to the batsman and pats him on his back, shouting, 'Great shot da, Viji.' Though such extreme acts of sports-

manship were not a daily occurrence, most of the cricket of the time was played in a spirit of friendly combat.

Cricket was initially an elitist pursuit, learned originally from the British by the landed gentry and educated upper crust and then percolating to the middle class. It was Buchi Babu Nayudu, a dubash well-versed in the ways of the ruling British at the turn of the century, who first assembled an Indian outfit capable of beating the 'European' at his own game. Soon the game spread far and wide in Madras – from Purasawalkam to Perambur, Triplicane to Mylapore and beyond, with caste Hindus and Anglo-Indians the most prominent practitioners of the game.

'Curdrice cricketers' was the epithet still reserved for Madras cricketers of my time, especially of the Brahmin variety (who probably form a substantial percentage of the cricket playing population of the city even today), though the demographics of the game was gradually changing, with many of the Anglo-Indians leaving India, and more and more of the 'backward communities' taking to the game with each succeeding generation. It was a sarcastic reference to the soporific effect of the staple diet of the majority back then. We were said to lack the steel for stern battle, our artistry and skills no match to the aggression of cricketers elsewhere.

Brilliant strokemakers and spin bowlers in local cricket, we were considered no-hopers when it came to locking horns with the more robust if less stylish combatants from Delhi or Bombay. Fielding was at best an una-

voidable nuisance and the slips the preserve of seniors, with the babies of the team banished to the distant outposts of long leg and third man. Fast bowling was too close to real work, left best in the hands of those endowed with more brawn than brain.

League cricket then was relatively informal. There was no registration of players by the clubs, and you could walk in a few minutes before the toss and join the eleven. There was much banter and fielders and batsmen often traded jokes or gossip, with the umpires sometimes joining in. The action rarely approached the frenetic and the accent was invariably on style rather than substance. The spinner who did not turn the ball and the batsman of dour defence or crude power were treated with contempt by all these different constituents of the game in my youth. To give you an idea of the cricketing values of the period, I – as an off spinner – was not infrequently warned by umpires that all my appeals would be refused unless I flighted the ball! To them, how you bowled was more important than taking wickets.

On most grounds, the shade of a large tree served as the dressing room and facilities were generally primitive. Lunch involved a hurried dash to Ratna Café, Udipti Sukha Nivas, Shanti Vihar, Udipti Home or Dasprakash and back, depending on the venue of the match. The effects of the blazing sun were countered by glasses of unboiled, unfiltered and often multihued water stored in mud pots or brought in buckets that resembled relics dug out by archaeological expeditions.

Most Madras cricketers were unable to afford high quality gear. In fact, you needed contacts abroad or access to visiting Test cricketers to buy bats and other gear from them at fancy

prices. A Gunn and Moore, Gray Nicolls or Autograph bat could cost upwards of a hundred rupees and that was a lot of money for the average cricketer. The gloves, leg guards and shoes worn by most of us often performed a psychological rather than protective role. At the lower levels of cricket it was not unusual for batsmen to wear a single leg guard rather than a pair because that was all the team could afford. The bats could be handcrafted things of beauty, but they did not possess the carry of contemporary bats that can send a top edge out of the ground.

Despite these constraints or possibly because of them – for they served to make playing cricket seem an adventure, a privilege earned by the worthy, not something handed to you on a platter as it is today – the enthusiasm for the game was plentiful and infectious among players and spectators alike, not to mention the men behind the scenes like club secretaries, scorers and markers. Of humour, there was never any shortage and the spirit of competition was always softened by a sense of camaraderie that went beyond team loyalties.

Cricket was an indispensable part of growing up in sleepy Madras of the 1950s and 1960s. Everywhere in the city, there were cricket-mad children, their fancy fed by radio commentary and newspaper reports, and the occasional visit to the cricket ground to watch their local heroes. In most houses with sizable compounds, siblings, cousins and their neighbourhood friends played much of their cricket within the four walls of their homes. We had charcoal stumps drawn on a number of walls in the compound, every corridor and hallway was a makeshift ground when it was too hot outside, there were three or four pitches within the compound that we kids

levelled and rolled – even had cowdung sprayed by our helpful domestic staff – but for most of us the crowning glory was a vast ‘ground’ nearby, empty plots of land still to be swallowed by residential buildings.

Usually, the wicket was a beauty, levelled by humans and cattle using them as shortcuts from one street to another. The ground was often manicured by grazing buffaloes, which seemed to equal the human population of the streets we lived on.

Only when it rained did the playing surface pose problems, challenging the technique and courage of the barefoot batsmen, while transforming military medium pacers into demon fast bowlers. The hoofmarks of the buffaloes on wet soil hardened into dangerous ridges from which the ball reared up steeply. Batting then became largely a matter of survival of the luckiest.

There were countless such private grounds which the young cricketers simply entered one day and occupied, so to speak, until the Rip Van Winkle who owned the plot woke up suddenly to build his dream house, in the process shattering the dreams of many prospective Prasannas and Venkataraghavans, Pataudis and Bordes. Only for the dreams to be resumed in technicolour as soon as the intrepid young cricket warriors conquered their next new territory.

Cricket did not stop even in the classroom, where boys played ‘book cricket’, by opening pages at random and affixing runs or dismissals to the two imaginary batsmen – they could be Mankad and Roy in one generation and Gavaskar and Viswanath the next. If for example you opened page 54, the second digit was the reference point for the scorekeeping, and the batsman got four runs (or two, under a different set of rules), if the page number

ended in a zero, the batsman was declared out and so on.

In my extended family, we invented our own brand of home cricket, an ingenious adaptation of the bagatelle board in which we gave cricket values to the various points on the board. 150 was six runs, 125 was four, LTP was bowled, 75 was two runs, 90 three, and we had different positions for different kinds of dismissals, caught, lbw, stumped, run out, even hit wicket. A skilful player, experienced in steering the little steel ball bearings we used for marbles, could make his team score 300-400 runs if he held his nerve, and score those runs pretty rapidly. It provided perverse pleasure to make Laker and Lock or Desai and Surendranath score centuries after the top order had failed.

Madras cricket of those days had its share of characters. P.R. Sundaram, a first rate fast medium bowler and an entertaining wielder of the long handle, was also one of the funniest men seen on a cricket field. He kept up a fairly constant chatter on the field, and was not above laughing at an umpire after he had given a dubious decision. He once informed an official after he had lifted his finger in response to his own loud appeal, that the poor batsman had not played the ball on its way to the wicketkeeper. On another occasion, he bowled a googly as his opening delivery of the match and laughed with his arms akimbo at the batsman who had been bowled shouldering arms.

Some others raised a laugh without intending to. There was 'Kulla Kitta' Krishnamurthy, who opened the innings for Crom-Best Recreation Club, one of numerous short statured players known by that nickname over the years, who, dismissed off the first ball of a match once, told the incoming batsman as they crossed: 'Be care-

ful. He moves the ball both ways.' 'Dochu' Duraiswami bowled a series of full tosses in a junior match at the Central College ground in Bangalore and later declared to his teammates: 'I have never bowled on a turf wicket before.'

Opening batsman Balu sat up all night reading Don Bradman's 'The Art of Cricket' with every intention of putting precept into practice, only to be run out first ball next morning, his partner's straight drive brushing the bowler's fingers on the way to the stumps, and catching him out of the crease! 'Clubby' Clubwalla was another popular character whom the crowds loved to boo, for his slow batting and fascinating contortions whether batting at the top of the order or bowling his alleged off spin with a most complicated action. He was a stonewaller par excellence who once made 37 runs in a whole day of batting.

There were other unforgettable characters. Probably the best known was K.S. Kannan, the veteran all-rounder who became one of the best-loved coaches of the state, more famous for his original English than his undeniable cricket skills. For a man who was fluent in Tamil, his mother tongue, but could barely pass muster in English, he loved expressing himself in the Queen's language, with invariably hilarious results. 'Give me the ball to him,' he would tell one of his wards, and 'ask me to pad up one batsman.' 'Thanking you, yours faithfully, K.S. Kannan,' were the famous last words of a speech he made at a school function.

In recent years, the stylish right hand batsman T.E. Srinivasan was famous for his wit and eccentric behaviour. On an Australian tour, his only one, T.E. allegedly told a local press reporter, 'Tell Dennis Lillee T.E. has arrived.' On the same tour he

persuaded a security official at a Test match to warn innocent Yashpal Sharma that he would be arrested if he continued to stare at the ladies through his binoculars. Yashpal's panic and the resultant roar of laughter from the Indian dressing room caused a stoppage in the middle as the batsman Gavaskar drew away annoyed by the disturbance.

League matches often attracted crowds in excess of a thousand and the 30-overs a side Sport & Pastime (later *The Hindu*) Trophy final invariably drew five or six thousand spectators. Many finals were played at the Marina ground on the Beach Road, now Kamarajar Salai, which wore a festive appearance on such occasions, with every seat in the gallery taken, every treeshade occupied and dozens of cars and scooters parked on Beach Road, providing a vantage view of the match from just beyond a low wall. If you were patrolling the boundary line, you could eavesdrop on the most knowledgeable cricket conversations among spectators who knew not only the finer points of the game but also the relative merits of all the league teams and their players backwards. You could even receive some useful advice gratis, but God save you if you misfielded or dropped a catch!

Devoted spectators sometimes went from ground to ground watching more than one match in a single day. 'IOB 73 for 4 at Viveka, State Bank 100 for no loss at Marina, Jolly Rovers 82 for 2 at Pachaiyappa's,' one of them, a league cricket fanatic of many years' standing, would announce even before parking his scooter. Quickly collecting the scores at this new venue, he would troop off to provide similar information to players at another ground anxious to learn how the competition was faring elsewhere. Today, coaches and managers carry cell

phones and information is exchanged instantly and effortlessly by all the protagonists involved in the chase for match points.

A Ranji trophy match between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka or Hyderabad could draw a crowd of 20,000-30,000 paying spectators. A match at Chepauk, with all its historic association with the 'Pongal' match of yore, was a most enjoyable spectacle, watched by somnolent vacationers seated under the trees surrounding the ground. That was before the concrete cauldron that today effectively reduces cricketers to dehydrated invalids in a matter of hours came to dominate the landscape.

It was an occasion to pack your *puliyodarai* and *thair sadam* and set out on a day-long excursion to catch up with old friends, and in their company, dissect the doings of the protagonists of the drama being enacted before you, to applaud or barrack bowlers, batsmen and fielders.

Madras crowds are not only knowledgeable but generally hard-to-please as well. They will never accept Anil Kumble as a better bowler than their own V.V. Kumar, a wrist spinner in the orthodox mould unlike the Karnataka express googly specialist. Gundappa Viswanath of the steely wrists and the nonchalant artistry ranks higher with them than Sunil Gavaskar, for all the Little Master's achievements and peerless technique.

Oldtimers even today experience goosebumps when they recall a magnificent innings of 215 played at Chepauk by the Ceylon stylist Sathasivam in 1940. According to many, no better innings has ever been played at Chepauk. But post-War cricket enthusiasts rate G.R. Viswanath's unbeaten 97 against West Indies in January 1975 as the greatest innings in living memory, better than the best

Gavaskar and Tendulkar knocks played at the same venue – and there have been plenty of those at Chepauk. The Triplicane crowds still wax lyrical about E.A.S. Prasanna's deadly spell in 1969, when he had Australia reeling at 24 for 6, and will be the first to admit that their own local hero Venkataraghavan could not have hoped to equal the magic of that afternoon.

That is the one feature of the Madras crowd that you will rarely find elsewhere in India – the ability to transcend regional, even national bias to appreciate true sporting endeavour and artistry. This sportsmanship was never more in evidence than when the Pakistanis under Wasim Akram did a victory lap at the end of a pulsating match India almost won in 1999. I remember the drama of that afternoon as though it happened yesterday. The crowd had been roaring its approval all morning as Tendulkar led an incredible assault on the rival bowling, supported by the gallant Nayan Mongia. Unfortunately, with victory seemingly within easy reach, Sachin succumbed to the strain of the painful back injury he had been carrying throughout the innings, and soon it was all over for India.

There was a stunned silence, as if the huge crowd was still waiting for a signal from the small but significant saffron brigade in the stands that had been shouting anti-Pakistan slogans on the last day of the match (Bal Thackeray had earlier called for a ban on the tour). Like many others in the pavilion terrace, I looked back anxiously at the leader of the group, who, after what seemed like an interminable wait, gave the thumbs up to his followers. They burst into applause and the rest of the stadium joined in thunderous ovation as the victors did their triumphant march around the ground.

It was a moment to make every Indian proud.

This wonderful spectator support for cricket is bolstered by passionate corporate enthusiasm for the game. Chennai is the home of a uniquely powerful form of industry-institution cooperation to promote sport, especially cricket. Companies like India Cements, Chemplast Sanmar, SPIC, India Pistons, MRF and SICAL have 'adopted' colleges and spent fortunes on developing and maintaining world class cricket facilities, with superb turf wickets and practice facilities. Institutions like Southern Railway, Integral Coach factory and Sri Ramachandra Medical College also maintain similar grounds. These patrons as well as public sector banks SBI, IOB and Indian Bank have traditionally ensured the livelihood security of sportsmen by offering them jobs or professional contracts, though the banks are now no longer the safe havens they used to be. The MRF Pace Foundation, the MAC Spin Foundation and numerous private initiatives serve to supplement the coaching programmes of the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association, one of the better run cricket bodies in the country.

All these developments have helped transform the Tamil Nadu cricketer into a professional, physically and mentally tougher than his predecessors. Proof is provided by the greater frequency of the state team's appearance in the final rounds of the Ranji Trophy and the increasing number of Tamil Nadu players knocking at Test doors in recent times. Yet, like the many corporate patrons of the state's cricket, most of whom have supported it for love of the game rather than any publicity, I still enjoy the curdrice flavour of Tamil Nadu cricket that has lingered despite the march of time and hope it does not lose it altogether.

New wine in the old bottle

TIMERI N. MURARI

Ohhh, how many aspersions have rained down on my home town over the years. It's been called iddliville, thayresaadamtown, sambarsuburb, dhotiville. At one time when it was known as Madras, it deserved those names. Madras might have been the capital of the vast sprawl south of the Vindhya range called Madras Presidency but it had never had any pretensions to capital lifestyles. Frankly, it was a village well into the mid-20th century.

At dusk, the town went to sleep as everyone maintained those old village habits believing that without natural light one slept, and woke before dawn for a day's healthy work. Our visitors were few and far between, and spent most of their brief stay whining about the heat and the humidity and, above all, nothing to do apart from sitting on our famous Marina beach watching the tide come in and out. We probably had a red light district but I was damned if I knew where it was, unlike notorious Bombay with its Grant Road that I'd only heard about.

No one dreamt of eating out in a restaurant, not that there were many to choose from – either a *thali* or the

famous Chunking on Mount Road. If I had dared to suggest lunch or dinner in a restaurant my grandmother would drown me in guilt. 'Why? What's wrong with my food? Isn't it good enough for you that you have to spend money to eat rice and sambar in a restaurant? Is restaurant food better than mine?' Of course not, I'd reply meekly, beaten by her logic, and settle for her excellent cooking.

Food forms one of the basis of any cultural identity and, quite rightly, we were identified by what we ate. The British had honed foody insults into a fine art. You were what you ate. The French are still the 'frogs' for their fondness for this delicacy, and it has a sharper sting than being called 'snails'. While the Germans remain 'krauts' because of their fondness for sauerkraut. Many Asians in Britain are called 'papadoms' which may reflect the old Empire's dying imagination for insults.

We Madrasis were conservative in our eating habits, and conservative as people. We were not big drinkers, that's if we could get a drink between the bouts of prohibition that came and went like a bad flu. Tandoor was

a foreign word and a foreign food, and Madrasis resisted any invasion of northern Indian culinary favourites. We allowed in the biryani but slyly subverted it by making it with vegetables and changing its taste and texture. Way back then in those traditional days the first time I tasted a tandoori chicken and nibbled on a naan was in a flock-papered Indian restaurant in London.

I left my town, we couldn't call it a city back then, for a long time and returned a few years ago. It had grown up suddenly in this last decade; it became hot in more ways than just the constant heat. Today in its new *avatar* as Chennai, the city, yes it can be called that today, has leapt over centuries to become a gourmet's delight, if not a paradise. It's as if with the name change we took on a new identity, not backward looking as the ancient name suggests, as it was called that when the British christened this strip of plantain patch on the Coromandel coast as Madras.

We're a 21st century people now, welcoming exotic dishes from all over the world. You want lobster thermidor, you've got it; want steak au poivre, you've got it. You can wallow in cannelloni, spaghetti with pesto sauce, duck à la orange, enchiladas, fish and chips, couscous, tortillas, paellas and wash them down with Australian and French wines, along with Indian brands. And this is not including Korean, Japanese, Thai, Chinese, tandoori dabbas, Chettinad, Gujarati, Bengali restaurants and hamburgers, pizzas and chicken kings.

Sophisticates in the other metros may mutter 'So what?' but this is a quantum leap for the Madrasi. We may still consume an idli or two for breakfast but for dinner we'll dine on lamb cutlets with a delicate béarnaise sauce, washed down with a Pinot Noir or a

Burgundy. Now we're harder to define as we straddle our past and the future. We're sliding somewhere in the slipstream of cultural homogeneity, trying to keep our balance in the whirlwind rush of changes.

One day we had graceful girls dancing the Bharatanatyam at weddings, now we have belly dancers at Mehendi's. Unbelievable, and as villagers we all crowd around to get a glimpse of this vibrating belly when we barely glimpsed a belly button in the old days. The older generation would have swooned at such sacrilege. A friend from Mumbai, however, sneered and whispered to me that belly dancing was *passé* in his city. 'In Mumbai we used to have them but no longer,' he added with somewhat of a sneer. I figured in Mumbai they had to be into lap top dancers at the city weddings or even the dancers from the Crazy Horse, and no doubt Chennai will catch up with that trend, even if a few years late.

But we're getting there, running as fast as we can. We're getting over our social and sexual inhibitions. Another friend, condemned to two weeks in Chennai and resigned to spending his evening watching television in his hotel room, made friends in a disco and spent his evenings skinny dipping in private swimming pools along the East Coast road. He was ecstatic, proclaiming Chennai was more hip than his Mumbai. It was his luck to fall into the right swimming pools which I never knew existed.

All these changes have sort of snuck up on Chennai when it was still contemplating its masala dosai, until one day it went to sleep to the soothing sounds of a veena and was awakened rudely by rock/pop music on Radio Mirchi, the latest FM station with non-stop music and non-stop chatter. Chennai slept, dreaming of its

girls wrapped in six yards of saree – Kanjeevaram, Mysore silk, voile – and woke to find them all now in jeans and sweat shirts, racing around on their scooters with cell phones pinned to their ears instead of malipu. Not a hip-hugging saree in sight, except at weddings and even there you'll see more skimpy salwars than chaste sarees to hide their sexy south Indian figures.

Girls meet boys openly now, flashing the latest fashions in the discos that have opened up in the city hotels, five, four and three star, but like so many cinderellas and cinderellas they have to vanish back into the city at the midnight hour as the cops don't allow the discos to remain open until dawn. They'll re-appear mid-afternoon into late evening, and all weekend, coming out of the woodwork to hang out in the Ispahani Centre on Nungumbakkam High Road.

You may think that the winds of change sweeping through sleeping Madras blew in from the West, along with 'Spiderman' and 'Sex in the City'. Far from it. The winds, like those ancient conquerors, swept down from north of the Vindhyas. Anyone from north of that chain are Punjabis, whatever their origin or their language, even as every Southie is called a Madrasi in the North. Our invaders drifted into the town gradually, bringing with them their social habits and imposing them on us unsuspecting Madrasis. They changed the dress styles of our women for a start. Before they brought their influence into Madras, all the women dressed in demure sarees. If some of our young women took to jeans, the others discovered and embraced the salwar with enthusiasm. I don't see a saree-clad college-going girl anywhere today and even the older women working in banks, IT, or insurance, are

in their uniform salwars. They all give the same reason—easier to wear, practical and not so much angst ironing a six yard saree.

Where once dinner parties were docile affairs, finishing long before midnight, our Punjabi invaders kept us up drinking until well past midnight before serving us tandoori chicken, saag, kebabs and naans as the sun rose. They changed our Deepavalis into Diwalis, a time to eat and drink, and taught us to play poker all night long while cleaning us out. They taught us *sangeet* and *mehndi* and, most blasphemous of all, introduced us to liquor at wedding receptions when all we'd ever had before was a vegetarian thali and a lime juice.

All this was infectious. Soon we Madrasis too began to include these boisterous customs into many of our weddings; admittedly not all families followed suit. The more traditional remained steadfast to the six am *muhurtham*, followed by breakfast and an evening reception, alcohol-free. I believe I now have more 'Punjabi' friends than Madrasis. They brought in their exuberance and didn't like the idea of staying at home every evening, eating home-cooked food. They ventured out into the night and soon the hotels had to have twenty-four hour coffee shops, but that wasn't enough. My friends wanted Italian and French and Spanish food to break the monotony, to escape from the city on the magic carpet of their palates to distant lands, so the city responded by opening up these escape holes to Europe and America. Punjabis flashed their money around, but we Madrasis retained our conservative spending habits.

Oh yes, we Madrasis were quite parsimonious with our money, and we still are. I know multi-millionaires who dress humbly in shirt and trousers and drive around in Hondas or Skodas

although they can afford a few Mercs. Even though Nalli, the man who created the saree mega store with branches in London and LA, moves around in a Merc, he still wears his simple white dhoti and jiba and, whenever I see him, he hurries away from his acquisition as if in embarrassment.

Unlike their counterparts in the North, we wealthy Chennaites don't like to flaunt our wealth. It could also be to avoid the notice of the tax man but it's ingrained in the culture to keep a low and humble profile. The man sitting next to you at a *sabha* or a dinner in his dhoti and jiba could be the wealthiest in the city but you'd never guess it. But a quick glance at his wife, overloaded with gold, diamonds and rubies like a Christmas tree, will correct any first impression.

Until a decade ago, we were happy to shop in the old parts of the city – Rattan Bazaar, Flower Bazaar, Parrys Corner. They supplied the necessities, nothing fashionable or flamboyant. Or, if we craved for the 'phoren' goods there was always Burma Bazaar, a thin stream of shops flowing outside Madras port where you could buy anything from French wines to an Italian cooker.

Then something mysterious began to gradually happen in this sleepy village. A shopping mall or two popped their heads up, nervous as gophers on a prairie. Would they survive or scuttle back into their holes, defeated by the conservatism and penny-pinching Madras habits? The malls weren't the grand expanse of capitalism to be found in the US or Europe, merely three or four floors of shops. You must remember, unlike Bombay, Madras is a horizontal city, not vertical, and three or four floors of shops at one location were unheard of. It's also a city without a centre. There's no Times Square or Oxford Circus, no downtown.

The humble malls changed this. They were attractive, certainly not stunning, architecturally. They drew people in, not merely to shop but to hang out and by hanging out they shopped. Alsa Mall in Egmore was the most popular. It had a coffee shop, British Airways, Titan watches and couple of men's clothing stores. Soon malls sprang up like mushrooms in a damp cellar. Some thrived, others withered but most importantly they had arrived. And as the survivors thrived they became bolder, more stylish and the shops began to specialise in fashion, accessories, jewellery, furniture.

The most successful one today is Spencer's Plaza, the biggest shopping mall in India. Back in the old days when the British were still here, Spencer's was the biggest department store in Asia. Then a few years ago the old Spencer's mysteriously burned down and like a phoenix rising from the ashes came our new high rise Spencer's with floor upon floor of shops. We changed with the times as the city's name changed and today you can buy anything from a gold Rolex to a Sony digital camera, from designer clothes and every foreign label to Lee jeans. We may not match Mumbai with its vast range of consumer items and fashionable designer clothes but we have enough to satisfy our moderate tastes for the modern.

But the past has not lost its hold on us. The patina of modernity lies lightly on our souls, we have adapted to it to make us more accessible and acceptable to all the new breed of invaders—Punjabis, the Brits (again), Americans, French, Germans, Japanese. In the South, Bangalore has changed from its Britishness to its Punjabiness; they have even imported in their gangsters to lend it additional character. But Bangalore always

had an unstable identity. A friend remarked that the Tamil and Tamilians are cohesive, and difficult to submerge in any new identity. We remain a courteous and gracious people, and have not yet picked up the abrasive habits of the North or the West. We visit our temples regularly and draw the morning kolam outside our doors, even in the new flat-style living we've adapted to.

Unlike the North we have such a strong and unshakeable belief in ourselves and our religion that we do not practise any communalism. We have kept this slate, so badly stained in so many parts of India, clean. Christian, Muslim, Jain, Sikh live among us without the dread of a riot or a pogrom. They're confident that, over the centuries, we have always treated them with respect. I admit our politicians do try to stir up hatred, and succeed from time to time especially out in the rural areas and smaller towns, but it doesn't work in this city. In that, we have resisted the north Indian animosity towards different faiths. Those remain still north of the Vindhya's.

On the surface, as you drive through the city, you may imagine we have totally discarded the saree. But walk into Nalli's or any of the new chic saree stores anytime and you'll find it crowded with women buying their sarees. From being an everyday dress it's now taken on a fashion as a formal evening attire.

We're still book lovers. Recently, a writer from Delhi came to give us a reading of his new book and though he was unknown, he was surprised to find around fifty people waiting to hear him. He remarked at the start of his talk that in Delhi he would not have even bothered to have a reading as no one would show up. After all, the South does have a much higher literacy rate than the North and this is reflected in

the popularity of books, both in English and the regional languages.

The jewel in our crown is our festival season. During November and December we still have a cultural feast of music and dance which is attended by both Madrasis and visitors from all parts of India and the world. I have Indian friends in America who regularly fly over to immerse themselves in this cultural lake which renews and invigorates them for the rest of the year in their America. No other city, anywhere in India or the world, has such a cultural extravaganza annually. Over a period of 20 days 1500 musicians, singers and dancers perform in 20 venues (sabhas) around the city.

The basis of the festival is, of course, to celebrate Carnatic music but we also have dancers and musicians from all over India vying to be included in this cultural orgy. The programmes begin nearly at dawn and finish only around midnight, and the sabhas are packed. And if you think it's only the old attending these concerts, think again. I've seen eight and ten year old children sitting still as rocks for three to four hours listening to classical music and keeping the beat. They might then go out and listen to their MTV but deep down they still retain their cultural roots through their music and dance. What other city can offer its people such a deep cultural and traditional mooring?

Cities retain their characters, no matter who invades them, and you can sniff it in the air. New York smells of the manic infectious energy, London of the staid and historical stability, Paris of possible romance and beauty. The Madras air, beneath the new odours of Chanel and pesto sauces, and even its name change, is still replete with odours of sambar and rasam and, more significant, is soaked in culture and old traditions.

Madras in words

SHREEKUMAR VARMA

A net surfer recently wrote: 'I live in Denver, Colorado. I met a padre from a local church in our gym. We swim in the same pool. He once asked me about the name Madras. He thought it came about because the British used this town to lock up all those who revolted against them. They called them Mad Rascals, in short Mad-Ras.'

There is another story with a similar twist. The British were amused by the fact that Vekatappa Naik could be crazy enough to gift away so much land to Francis Day (to build Fort St. George), asking in return only that it be named after his father Chennappa Naik (hence, Chennappattinam and then Chennai). So they called him the Mad Rasa, or the mad king. This single story explains both names, Madras and Chennai.

Someone else claims the name originated from Madri, wife of Pandu, official father of the Pandavas in the *Mahabharatha*. Madri was the mother of Nakula and Sahadeva, and is supposed to have come from this part of the country.

That's the trouble with Madras, or any other city which has great spurts of history with ambiguous linkages. I once wrote in my Sunday column that the later White Madras is available to the historian, but not the period before that. Chunks of native history before the English settlement have been virtually lost in romance and myth. Given the Indian penchant for invoking and revering legends, that early history can hardly be reclaimed with any acceptable degree of objectivity.

Historian S. Muthiah – sometimes referred to as 'Mr Madras' for his passionate interest in the city's history and heritage – picked up my lament and agreed whole-heartedly in his own column. He himself is, however, on an endless investigative spree, unearthing facts and fables that might help to patch up a forgotten fabric. There are, in fact, pockets in the metropolitan mapwork of this rapidly modernising city that still hide a treasure or two for the chronicler. Mylapore, the temple settlement, now struggles between trade and tradition. Spirituality, music, academics and islands of extreme conservatism jostle with breathless new commerce and traffic.

There are houses in Mylapore that still breathe in an ancient past. Artefacts and valuable old manuscripts are still being dug out. Coins from Roman times were found not too long ago. Senior citizens sit on pyols, brooding over their own versions of history. Preparing for an impressionistic book on Chennai, I wondered whether it was possible to sift history from myth and, indeed, if it was even advisable.

A city like Madras (or Chennai) is as much an idea as it is a living space. It is as much the sum of impressions gathered by people through the ages as it is the daily arena of those who struggle, enjoy and work out their lives. It is a socio-political laboratory where organised living is routinely experimented with. It can change with perspective, becoming different things to different people. This is the interesting aspect of working on a city like Chennai. Each book written about

the city opens up a different avenue of ideas.

I was confronted with an endless list of books already written. I had once feared there would be little reference material to work with. Now it was apparent that there was too much. And the internet being a repository (and dumping ground) of information, there was that area to be considered as well.

Taking a few of these books at random, let us look at their scope and success. Though many of them are repetitive and stick to already known areas, each one has, in one way or the other, its own contribution to make. For example, *Chennai: Memory Chips* (Legacy Publications, Chennai) is little more than a merry-go-round for tourists, relying heavily on earlier studies. However, for all that, it is also a compendium of quaint facts that come as a pleasant surprise, especially for the long-time Madras resident.

It neatly lists landmarks, pointing out to their ancestry. Did you know that the Kapaleeswarar temple tank in Mylapore was built on land gifted by the 18th century Carnatic Nawabs? More interesting, Muslims are permitted to come and bathe here during Moharram.

The Music College building (off Greenways Road) on the banks of the Adyar river was once the Brodie Castle. It was constructed in 1798 by an English civil servant, James Brodie. Now, after more than two hundred years, students of Carnatic music find fulfilment within its walls. Brodie himself drowned in the river in a boating accident.

The Cooum river, that ubiquitous life-line of the city which has thankfully sacrificed its much-touted stink for the sake of today's generation, is mentioned in the *Thevaram*. And Mylapore finds a reference as far back as Ptolemy in 140 A.D.

On Cathedral Road, Hotel Chola Sheraton has replaced the old house where Gandhiji once stayed. It was from here in 1910 that he announced his *satyagraha* against the Rowlatt Bill. The book contains these random little peeks behind the curtain, delighting those who know only today's Chennai.

In the city's bustle, amidst the shrill call of the IT revolution, the pubs and fashion stops, the sleek glass and upstart high-rises, it would be interesting to occasionally pause and listen to such whispers of history.

The one man who has perhaps contributed most to our knowledge of the city's past is S. Muthiah. If it isn't through his regular newspaper columns and articles, it is through an unbelievable number of books probing and celebrating the city. His stated preference is for books of the coffee-table variety with profuse illustrations and lush production values.

His books include *Madras Discovered, Tales of Old and New Madras, Madras – The Gracious City, Parrys 200, The Parry Story, Getting India on The Move, A Planting Century, Madras – its Past and its Present, The Spencer Legend, Madras – its Yesterdays and Todays and Tomorrows, At Home in Madras and The Spirit of Chepauk*.

His book *Madras Discovered* (164 pages) which was written in 1981 has grown in leaps and bounds, culminating for the moment in the vastly enhanced *Madras Re-discovered* (417 pages). The book has broadly everything that the armchair historian needs to know about this city, beginning with Muthiah's favourite enquiry into the origin of the city's name. He throws up stories and interesting antecedents about landmarks and events. A remarkable example of how he peels away story after story from around a single focal point can be had from the piece

on Chepauk. The name is now synonymous with cricket but he talks about the Chepauk Palace which once belonged to the Nawabs of the Carnatic but ended up housing government offices. Along the way, he traces the history of the nawabs, touches upon the Madras Cricket Club and rounds off its history, adding so many more facets to the uni-dimensional name.

Muthiah revels in peeking behind the curtain. Preserving the heritage buildings of Madras is a holy mission for him. To achieve this, he shares his stories of the past so that even laymen can begin to understand the value of these monuments. It is no secret that many who write about the city depend on him for information. Many a heritage building has also survived because of the interest he showed in its preservation.

However, I was fortunate to bring to his notice a little-known book of fiction that threw dappled light on the city during the turn of the nineteenth century. This is what I wrote in my *Sunday Express* column:

'It is a novel by a woman named B.M. Croker who lived and wrote during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The publishers have provided little information about her and the novel itself is not dated. A little bit of detective work revealed that the story takes place around 1911. The author's name rang a bell, harking back to conversations with my grandfather, and his collection of books. But I couldn't, for the life of me, place this book. It was called *In Old Madras*. And it really is. But a White Madras. The Indians are either lowly servants or faintly disreputable heads of faintly disreputable companies right in the heart of Blacktown.'

'You have a mansion in Egmore set on a vast rolling compound and of an evening there are balls and dinners and

terribly focussed card games, magnificent coaches and cars driving up the impressive driveway and white sahibs and memsahibs dancing and gossiping and flirting and putting one over the other. To chill out (of course they don't say that) they drive down to the club near the Island, which must be today's Madras Gymkhana, and a beautiful-but-bored wife may leave her husband in mid-sentence in the heat of a summer evening and drive off down the promenade with an alternate escort. You have punkhas and polo and prim protocol. Mount Road, Marmalang Bridge, the Neilgherries – except for a bit of gymnastics with the spelling, they're all there and so different from how we know them today. At one point someone says, "It's in Blacktown! I beg its pardon – Georgetown!"

"I wasn't in the mood for long Jane Austenish fare. In fact, I had to grit my teeth and wade through the first few pages. And then I was coasting along. I couldn't stop! It is an exciting story. A young Englishman, Captain Mallender, newly discharged from the army, sets out to India to find the whereabouts of his uncle, missing and declared dead for the last thirty years. He thinks the man in control of his estate is now impersonating his uncle and he wants to expose him. His adventures take him to interesting places and predicaments and he meets many strange people. The Madras we find in the book is a fascinating place of slow boulevards and leisurely life-styles. (Of course, you would have to be white and British.)

"There is intrigue and deception, romance and love, excitement and adventure, physical pain and heart-break. The ending is breath-stopping. The hero travels incognito and you are as tense as he is when he chances upon unexpected discoveries. When he arrives at a place named Panjeverram, I couldn't help but exclaim: "Good

Lord, are you talking about Kancheepuram, or have you misspelled some other name!"

"It's been a long time since I have read such a book. Robust and romantic and frankly unputdownable. It has its clichés and melodrama and pat situations, but what is life without those! And incidentally it gave me plenty of information about Madras in that sepia-tinted time. Madras according to Croker, that is" (9 March 2003, *New Indian Express*).

Muthiah was so taken up by the reference that he immediately bought and read the book and discussed it at a Madras Book Club meeting. He found several holes in its authenticity, especially with regard to dates, but thoroughly enjoyed the spirit of the place it conjured up.

I would also like to make a passing reference to another book compiled towards the middle of the last century. *History Of The World*, edited by W.N. Weech and published by Odhams Press, London, is only relevant here for its brief conjecture about the quality of the Tamils. It probably explains the abundance of culture and trade, and the inward-looking native trait that discounted any ideas of expansionism: 'The Tamil and Telugu states in the south, especially those on the coasts of Travancore and Madras, were rich and prosperous, and Tamil poets flourished. Their sailors took their cargoes of cotton to the Ganges and the Irrawaddy. But their soldiers were never formidable and, though boundaries shifted, no southern ruler ever looked like uniting India.'

And continuing with references to Madras, here are some extracts from *Introduction to India* by Toby Sinclair (Odyssey Guides, Hong Kong, 1991). 'Despite its size and importance, Madras is a city that never hurries. Compared with India's other

major cities, Madras is a quiet back-water, conservative in its ways, with considerable importance placed on old-fashioned values and traditions. More women wear the traditional sari here than anywhere else in India; Brahmin men in finely woven white dhotis, their foreheads smeared with sandalpaste and sacred ash, go happily about their business, and every woman, regardless of status, has flowers in her hair.

'For all this, Madras is a clean and efficient city. It has an excellent public transport system; its autorickshaw scooters are all new and well maintained... There are some unexpected contrasts: the garish Tamil film posters decorating sections of Mount Road; the massive cutouts of politicians; and the hysteria of political meetings are just a few. Although Madras presents fewer of the hassles and tensions common in other Indian cities, the main shopping centres are always throbbing with life... The people of Madras smile easily, have time for each other and are helpful to visitors.'

I had, for a long time, been looking out for a novel in English and set in Madras, written by a Tamilian named S. Y. Krishnaswamy. A grand-uncle had once certified that it provided an authentic portrait of the city of its time. It was called *Kalyani's Husband*. There was a film of the same name, starring Shivaji Ganesan, and I wasn't sure whether it was an adaptation of this novel. Surfing the net to locate the book, I came across several Kalyanis and their husbands, but not the ones I wanted. When I entrusted the job to my son, he effortlessly and triumphantly returned with the book, having found it among a cache of old retrieved tomes.

The author, in his introduction, claims that the story is based on the life

of his cousin Kalyani and his friend Sekhar. He isn't writing fiction but 'about those who have been near and dear to me.' He says his job is easy because he doesn't have to invent, but difficult 'because I have to betray confidences without consent.' He is torn between the 'surging flood of recollection straining at my reticence' and his natural reluctance to wear his heart on his sleeve. He goes on to write that English novels of Indian life are 'poor stuff'. Nevertheless, he has decided to 'take the plunge'.

The language and manner of writing reminds you of a Hardy or Austen in spate. The novel begins in the grand manner with a stretched-out description of Madras ('there are changes of fashion in a city, as in women's clothes, but not of the same order of rapidity'). He describes people (merchant princes in their finery and the judges and leaders of the bar) and places (the commercial north and the more intellectual south). He is lavish about Mylapore, which he likens to Manchester. 'What Mylapore thought today Madras thinks tomorrow.' He devotes over five pages to this description, and never looks back throughout the novel. His descriptions are often tedious but follow the literary fashion of the day. He takes time to expand on various themes, intellectualising and philosophising, and even dwells at length on the intricacies of South Indian vegetarian cuisine.

Kalyani's Husband is mostly light and descriptive, and is easily a tale of manners, though its hero dies at the end of the story. That the author is smitten by Victorian novels is obvious, and Madras takes the place of London. The novel was printed at the Huntley Press, Armenian Street, in 1957.

A name that keeps haunting you as you go about hunting material on the city is that of Randor Guy. He is

a former lawyer named Rangadurai whouses his pen-name to intrigue readers into a world of whispered gossip and torrid romance, all from the bygone glitter of Madras. His chief playing field is cinema. There is little that he hasn't discovered about the triumphs and tragedies of yesteryear heroes and heroines of the Tamil silver screen. He has a phenomenal memory which assists him as much during his lectures as when he is writing. It is through these lectures and his articles and columns that he shares his often shocking stories. One of these stories is about a rich and famous gentleman of the city who was fond of playing Krishna. Armed with a flute and a mischievous smile, he sat atop a tree as scantily-clad girls hired for the purpose pleaded for their clothes from his swimming pool. Guy's 'history' of Madras is peppered with such almost unbelievable tales of drama and glitter.

This tales are peopled with legends like M.S. Subbulakshmi, Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, S.S. Vasan, MGR and a host of such unforgettable names. Already brimming with nostalgia, Guy further embellishes these names with his forays into a secret past.

The Story Of Fort St. George by Col. D.M. Reid, printed two years before independence at the Diocesan Press, has a foreword by the Madras Governor, Sir Arthur Hope. It was reissued in 1999 by Asian Educational Services (AES) in a trademark purple and gold edition. It is a small book, tracing the story of how the Fort was conceived and executed. Starting from Francis Day's appeal to his superior Andrew Cogan to grab the opportunity and start work on a settlement at the site that he had negotiated for, to a grand tour of the Fort as it was during his time. He narrates the history of European interest in the area and how the British clinched their claim.

There is a chronological table of events and illustrations showing the progressive changes in the premises. It is a brief study, focusing on the Fort and its historical background, adding to the numerous works on the city's founding. The (short-lived) pride of the Englishman is evident throughout the book.

Another Englishman with a penchant for Chennai is Colin Todhunter. Reading more like a diary of his escapades in a hot and mystic land, *Chasing Rainbows in Chennai* (published by Hacktreks, Canada, and marketed by Zine5, Chennai) has been of late discussed and read at quite a few venues. It is a mixture of pained and amused observation that brings to life the small details of daily living that escape the average citizen. He begins with an arduous trip to a gym where 'personality' is more vital than any tedious workout. It sets the stage for a 100 odd-page saga of helplessness, discovery and acutely felt experience.

He has a wild two-wheeler trip to Pondicherry, a painfully one-sided love affair, and many encounters with fellow travellers with weird identity problems; he acts in a film, ponders on the mysteries of train travel and the ubiquitous vendor, he enjoys 'meals' in roadside restaurants and philosophises on almost everything he sees. It doesn't help that he bears a strong resemblance to the Mumbai film star Sanjay Dutt. I met Colin in the beginning of last year. He was steeped in Chennai. It was a love-hate relationship that made him flee the city and then scamper back in no time at all.

These and many more raconteurs have sung about Madras that is Chennai. It isn't over as yet. The layers are still being peeled away as story after fascinating story emerges, still waiting to lay bare the longed-for, elusive soul of the city.

Books

MEHRAULI: A View From the Qutb. Text by Charles Lewis, photographs by Karoki Lewis. Harper Collins (distributed by Foundation Books), Delhi, 2002.

Karoki Lewis is a superb photographer. I enjoyed looking at the pictures in his earlier book, *Delhi's Historic Villages*. This one is different – in colour, not in black and white. There are some stunning shots of most of the buildings I love in the Mehrauli area – details of the facades, as well as portraits of the people who live there.

The text has many nuggets of information (like the story of Haji Roz/Haji Rozbih and Roz Bihan). There are satisfactorily copious extracts from Farhatullah Beg's lively piece on the Phulwalon ki Sair (rendered into English by Azra Kidwai). I was delighted to read about Gandhiji's visit to Mehrauli for the Urs of Bakhtiyar Kaki on 27 January 1948, and his plea to 'Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims who have come here with cleansed hearts, to take a vow at this holy place that you will never allow strife to raise its head, but will live in amity, united as friends and brothers.' He also commented on the beauty of the marble carvings at the *dargah*, and noticed with sadness how much of it had been destroyed. 'It is sheer vandalism.' How wonderful to learn that he was a pre-member of our Conservation Society of Delhi!

Mehrauli has been a landscape to escape into – whether it was the later Mughal rulers and their entourage going there in the rain drenched months, the British enjoying elegant picnics in the winter sun, or present-day children racing through the landscaped slopes near Jamali Kamali. It is also a miniaturised multi-faith shrine, with a *dargah*, a masjid, a mandir, a Jain shrine and a church. There is still room for a serious history of its multilayered architecture, built by successive rulers, and modified by Metcalfe and Sanderson.

This particular book can be read in many ways. It is a window to one area of Delhi, and hopefully will prompt others write on Karolbagh, on Civil Lines, on Kalkaji. So far, the only area in Delhi to have been dis-

cretely studied has been Shahjahanabad. Another way of seeing it is as a walk through a heritage area, a spin-off from the Conservation Society of Delhi's pioneering venture of guided walks in historic areas, the first of which, incidentally, was one in Mehrauli in 1984, conducted by Reena Nanda. A third is to read it as an attempt to enlist public support for conservation by making the argument in powerful visual terms, again taking off from the CSD's audio-visual presentation on Mehrauli. A fourth is to see it as a grown-ups' version of CENDIT's engaging little book about children from upper-class Delhi exploring Mehrauli – its ecology, history, architecture and social profile.

The buildings and the treescapes of Mehrauli are distinctive, the people are not. This is why I am not sure what is meant by saying that 'Mehrauli should not lose its identity.' The identity foregrounded is that of the premodern *qasba*, but the people who live and work in Mehrauli are, whether we like it or not, part of modern Delhi. To deplore its 'heedless expansion' and to feel nostalgic about its 'old-world charm' and refer to its 'heart' and its 'soul' may strike a chord in many of us, but it also suggests that this book is a view not from the Qutb, but from Delhi.

The problem with being a historian is that one sees things through bifocals – the distant-vision section of the lens sees the long history of Mehrauli, the near-vision one the problem of conserving what survives from the past. Why should we freeze things at this particular point of time when they have not been preserved earlier? Mehrauli has been continuously modified since the 11th century. Why not in the 21st? Who are we, who dwell in DDA mansions which we modify constantly, to dictate to people who live in older houses as to what they should not break down or extend? As a citizen, I doubt that stern laws can achieve anything.

This beautiful book will go some way to make people realise that there are artefacts and mini-landscapes in Mehrauli which should be retained. It will draw some individuals out from their air-conditioned

homes into their air-conditioned cars to see these sights for themselves, to walk through Mehrauli's one-way street, and to plunge into the paths bordered by under-growth beyond Jamali Kamali. But one has to carry the community along, and there must now be an effort to actively involve the people who live in Mehrauli in a continuous and committed exercise.

Narayani Gupta

**AND THE BAMBOO FLOWERS IN THE
INDIAN FORESTS: What Did the Pulp and
Paper Industry Do? (Volumes 1 & 2) by Manorama
Savur. Manohar, Delhi, 2003.**

Manorama Savur's sharp and sensitive, sometimes impassioned account of the impact of the pulp and paper industry (PPI) on large tracts of forests in the country is a tale worth telling. Responding to a growing demand for paper, the first industrial scale units made their appearance in India in the first half of the 19th century; by the end of the century there were many more.

In the early years of the 20th century, the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun discovered the virtues of bamboo as a pulpable material. The subsequent commercialisation of the technology led to an era of unprecedented growth for the industry – and the concomitant destruction of wide swathes of hitherto pristine forests. A reasonably straightforward proposition, backed by a half decade of diligent research across the spread of the country, led and coordinated by Manorama Savur.

The problem is that the reader has to dig it out. The two volume narrative is 705 pages long, dominantly prose, but some verse as well. It is liberally peppered with adjectives. Through the text flit a motley crew of characters – the rapacious industrialist, the ineffective forester, the conniving administrator and the simple tribal, and a host of institutions and committees.

The book is structured around eight chapters dedicated to seven states and the North East region. Each chapter contains a veritable mass of material on the state and its people. The material is informative and wide-ranging, although not always connected to the central theme. The 84 pages devoted to Orissa span a couple of thousand years ranging from the beginnings of Aryan civilization to its evolution as a state of the Indian Union. It exhaustively covers the JK Paper Mills and its functioning, but expends considerable paper as well on topography, drainage and the boundaries and extent of Forest Department territorial divisions.

Painstaking research, as Ms Savur and her team have indisputably carried out, deserves good editing. Spelling and typographical errors (amboo, firmaly) detract, and 60 word sentences are hard on the reader. Despite the distractions, the book contains fascinating and incisive insights into the evolution and practice of the management of forest wealth. Largely exploitative, uncaring and unsustainable, the system worked to the undoubted advantage of the PPI, and to the detriment of communities and people who had coexisted with the forests for generations.

Most of the research was carried out in the early 1990s. If the date of the preface is any indication, the book was ready to be published by mid-1996. The seven intervening years before it was made available have seen unprecedeted change in forestry management systems and attitudes. Judicial interventions, and not just at the level of the Supreme Court, have decisively altered the way in which forests are managed and produce extracted. The basis of these changes, far reaching in their consequence, was the activism and determination of environmental and social crusaders, and to whom this country owes a debt. Savur and her work are a part of this legacy of change, and the delay in publication is both inexplicable and unfair.

The opening out of the economy has since enabled the PPI to access cheap imported wood pulp and low grade timber. In the last 15 years or so, there has been a significant shift away from bamboo and forest timber to agro-residues and process waste as feedstock for paper manufacture. Occasioned by uncertainties of supply and gradually increasing practices, and enabled by liberal imports of machinery, this has engendered major changes in the relationship between the PPI and the Forest Departments. Disadvantaged by delay, Savur's book does not cover the post-1997 period. It would have made the account more interesting – and complete.

The working of bamboo forests rightly receives considerable attention. Ironically, the release of the book is extremely timely. There is a resurgence of interest in bamboo, going beyond its traditional and myriad applications. There is an emphasis on value addition, on utilising bamboo for newly emerging industrial applications to manufacture electricity, wood substitutes, composites and plywood, charcoal and activated carbon. In fact the Government of India has launched a major series of initiatives to harness the potential of bamboo to create employment and income, to add value through industrial processes and applications in much the same way that many coun-

tries in East and South East Asia have demonstratively been able to do in the last decade.

For almost a century, pulp and paper has been effectively the only industrial usage of bamboo. A host of alternative industrial applications are emerging, and will compete for raw material. The point that Savur's book reinforces is that technology and markets alone cannot transform this age old material into an agent of change for the 21st century. The development by the Chinese of industrial applications using bamboo was preceded by two decades of structural and technological transformation of the sector, resulting in productivities of as much as 30 tonnes per hectare. This contrasts with the average productivity of bamboo forests in India of half a tonne per hectare. The Chinese have focused on agro-forestry, allowing communities and cooperatives to grow bamboo on large plantations, and spent considerable effort on plant material, packages of practices and the management of bamboo.

Forest Departments in India are, however, not cultivators of bamboo, but as Savur points out, simply extractors, in many cases through a complex system of contracts and leases. This system is wasteful and inefficient. Bamboo is a grass, and not a tree. It is a truly renewable resource, if managed well; a clump, once stabilised, should be harvested each year, and not through the rotation cycles practiced by forest agencies. Such cycles are derived from timber management, and quite unsuited to bamboo.

The system of leasing out tracts of forests to contractors is a reasonably sure path to declining productivity and even destruction. The author cites numerous instances where large scale working of bamboo forests (*Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* in Nagaland, and *Dendrocalamus strictus* in central India) has triggered premature flowering, and subsequently stunted culm and clump growth.

One possible answer lies in the oft-implied and occasionally stated premise of the book, that people and communities are the best managers of their own resources. Homestead productivities for bamboo cultivation across eastern and North East India approximate those of Chinese plantations. Tribal communities have long and sustainably managed community bamboo forests. Here lies a wealth of knowledge and experience, one that needs to be studied and documented, adapted in packages of practices currently being developed, and supplemented with improved plant material and of course a fair market. The future of bamboo rests not with the Forest Departments, but with community and small holder plantations.

Bamboo accounts for less than a fifth of pulp intake now. It has come a long way from the 1950s, when bamboo accounted for over 80% of the raw material used by the mills. There are new opportunities ahead; bamboo can still be both catalyst and vehicle for change, if managed sustainably and used well.

Manorama Savur's book is important because it documents the process by which common resources were first transformed to administered property and then used substantially for private profit.

Vinay Oberoi

GANDHI IN HIS TIME AND OURS by David Hardiman. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003.

SATYAGRAHA is a quest for truth, a mode of engagement, which seeks to establish a moral ground. It is by being truthful and moral that the possibility of self-realization is established. In the introduction to his autobiography, Gandhiji said, 'What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha.' It was this pursuit that moved his being. For Gandhiji self-realization was not merely a goal for an individual being; it was the basis of civilization. Civilization for him was 'that mode of conduct, which showed man path of duty.' Self-realization or knowing oneself was swaraj, because it is only those who are capable of knowing themselves who are capable of self-rule. Swaraj is a moral quest, simultaneously personal and societal. Dialogue is the essence of this quest. It is a dialogue with the self, with the civilization and with other utopias or modes of knowing one's self.

Gandhiji's autobiography is a testimony to his continuous and deep dialogue with himself. He called his autobiography *Atmakatha*, which in general usage would have meant just an autobiography or one's story, but he restores to the term its deeper meaning: a story of the soul. At one level, by seeking to speak only of the journey of the soul in quest of moksha he 'Indianized' the autobiography. To write the *Atmakatha*, Gandhiji takes scientific method from the West and transforms it to become an inward analytical gaze and a form of self-experimentation. It is by bringing together 'scientific' analysis and religion as morality that Gandhiji creates the possibility of speaking about the self as a soul. It is literally through his soul-searching that he crafts a genre that is uniquely modern, truly Indian, but which also harks back to the

theological origins of the autobiography as medieval Christian practice. The *Atmakatha* is essentially a dialogic exercise.

It is possible to view Gandhiji's life as a series of intertwined, continuous dialogues. He carried on a deep dialogue with the West. At one level this was a dialogue with Christianity and the passions of Jesus. At another level it was a disconcerting encounter with modernity that sought to locate the focus of human judgement outside the human being; it made 'machines as the measure of man.' It also led him to engage with figures and traditions from the West who were seeking to locate themselves beyond the realm of modernity. The result of this dialogue was the *Hind Swaraj* which poses a moral question. Is it possible, the *Hind Swaraj* asks, to create a civilization where being moral and doing one's duty is possible, where the human worth is not measured by a non-human yardstick?

He also carried on a life-long dialogue with Hindu religion and Hindu society. At times it manifested itself in his dialogues with the Jain ascetic Shrimad Rajchandra, at other times in a debate with Dr. Ambedkar.

He created and nurtured spaces, which allowed self-experimentation and fostered a dialogic existence. His ashrams and the Gujarat Vidyapeeth were such institutional spaces but his finest contribution was the satyagraha. Satyagraha for him was not a technique; it was a mode of engaging with the self, with the civilization and with others in search of truth.

The idea of dialogue lies at the centre of David Hardiman's book. The book he says, involves first, 'a scrutiny of Gandhi's desired practice, that of striving to keep a wide range of dialogues open' and at another level, 'an examination of dialogues between... Gandhi and his ideas and practices, both during his lifetime and after his death, in India and outside India.' It is both an audacious and a fascinating enterprise.

The book thus deals with two broad concerns. The first of understanding Gandhiji's dialogues with himself, with his son Harilal, with the idea of nationalism, with the dalit, the adivasi and the Muslim questions. The other is with grappling with Gandhiji's legacy and what continuities are available to us.

David Hardiman presents to us the broad range and concerns of Gandhiji's dialogues. He is both sympathetic and troubled by Gandhiji's ideas and practices, in particular his unwillingness to comprehend Harilal's desire to be part of the modern world and by his inability to grant Dr. Ambedkar a moral ground.

The originality of his argument, however, lies in the second part of the book – the legacy of Gandhi and the nature of our engagement with his thoughts and practices. For Hardiman, the essential legacy of Gandhiji is dialogue and the practice of satyagraha. He discusses a wide range of concerns and individuals that have sought to establish continuities with Gandhiji's ideas and methods. He assembles a cast of characters that are fascinating by themselves; Vinoba and JP, Medha Patkar, Baba Amte and Petra Kelly, Lanza Del Vasto, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. He shows that the nature of their struggle has been moral and truthful. Their struggles sought to reaffirm the possibility of a plural and multiple cosmologies, ways of life. Their struggle also involved self-suffering, an essential part of the Gandhian satyagraha.

His sympathetic account of these individual lives and mass movements also harbours some disappointments. These disappointments are with the inability of our times to establish continuities with Gandhiji and his dialogues. This disappointment is most apparent in his account of Vinoba – a man Gandhiji described as an ideal ashramite, a man who carried the ashram within himself. This is largely because David Hardiman shares Ramachandra Guha's characterisation of Vinoba as 'a pious, puritan, and self-righteous man, devoid of humour and the capacity for self-criticism.' In his account of Vinoba and others, Hardiman concentrates of their obvious 'political' movements. Vinoba, however, was not only the man who endorsed the 'Emergency' on grounds of discipline but someone who carried on a lifelong dialogue with Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. He was also the person who gave us one of the finest commentaries on the *Gita*. However, this part does not inform Hardiman's analysis.

It is perhaps his unwillingness to discuss the spiritual aspects of the individual and mass struggles that gives his analysis a tone of disappointment. Of course, David Hardiman knows that the self-suffering of a Baba Amte and a Medha Patkar is not only political but also a deeply spiritual and moral act as well. Why then does he not speak of the spiritual basis of modern political struggles? Is it because he is troubled by Gandhiji's own obvious spirituality? Is it because he knows, like all of us, that the idea of the spiritual is no longer a dialogic entity in the realm of the political and that it, as a political and cultural discourse, has come to be hijacked by forces that are anti-dialogic?

Tridip Suhrud

Comment

Women and the WSF

LET'S build another world, because another world is possible, cried the recently concluded World Social Forum 2004 at Mumbai. The World Social Forum was formally born in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil as an alternative to the World Economic Forum. Having started off as an alternative to the WEF, the WSF has over the years grown, not as one unified response to the hegemonic globalization of the WEF (read WTO), but as a space for diverse democratic struggles in this very globalized world. Herein lies the WSF's greatest strength and challenge.

From pioneers of social movements and economists to anti-war protesters, dalit workers and farmers, to students and teachers, people from all walks of life made the WSF historic: They came from across the globe with separate agendas to contribute to the

overarching theme of anti-globalization and imperialism. But if anything united the random groups, it was surely the much-quoted determination to make the WSF 'the voice of the voiceless'.

It is ironic that even today, after almost four decades of their so called 'liberation movement', one social group is still voiceless and strives to make itself heard, not around any one social or economic issue, but on the very question of survival. Women across the globe still have horrifying stories to tell of their quest for survival, for equal rights, for freedom in a most limited sense, in a brutally patriarchal world.

As in the first three world social forums, at WSF 2004 too, women were everywhere. Irrespective of whether they were dressed in saris, kurtas or jeans, one could find women leading rallies, chairing sessions,

Whatever.

Whenever.

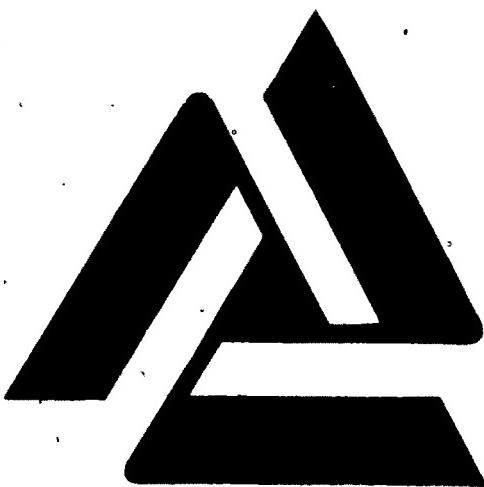
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serving homemade Maharashtrian food, walking with cameras or dancing along with the protest marches. The common denominator in this sheer diversity of women was their dream to build a more egalitarian world, a new world where women were treated as equal to men. It may, however, be noted that women were conspicuous by their absence in the more prominent debates on economic globalization, and a post-Cancun world. But this did not in any way diminish the brilliance of what they had to say, or the hope that they wanted delegates to take back with them.

Apart from faces like those of Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy and Asma Jahangir, familiar to Indians, it was great to hear what women from Latin America, Africa, Europe, Afghanistan and Bangladesh had to share. Prominent among these were human rights lawyer Irene Khan from Bangladesh, Egyptian novelist Nawal El Saadawi, Piedad Cordoba from Cuba, Iranian Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi and Sahar Saba from Afghanistan. What set these women apart was that they were not stuck in a whirlpool of mere rhetoric. They had stories to tell, stories of real women.

Prior to the opening of the WSF, independent of WSF 2004, a group of women organized a strategy meeting in Mumbai, dubbed as 'Feminist Dialogues: Building Solidarities'. It comprised a core planning team from several feminist groups that first convened in Porto Alegre, Brazil during WSF 2003 in support of the Campaign against Fundamentalism. The team included representatives from Articulacion Feminista Marcoseur (AFM), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET); INFORM, Isis International-Manila, Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ) and the organizing group of Indian women's organizations gathered under the National Network of Autonomous Women's Groups (NNAWG). The Feminist Dialogues was an attempt to transnationalise feminist debates and visions and examine the interlinkages between feminist movements and other social movements.

The WSF, however, was not characterized by an over-emphasis on the 'women's angle'. The only WSF sponsored seminar on women was titled 'Wars against women, women against wars'. It was a theme that encapsulated not only the effect of real war, but all forms of violence that women are victims of by virtue of being just that, women. In addition to the main seminar, two smaller seminars stood out - 'Women and permanent war' organized by the Rosa Luxemburg

Foundation, Germany, and 'The world court of women on war crimes' by the Asian Human Rights Council. These seminars were chaired not by academics, but women driven to activism. Resultantly, what these women had to share were not feminist theories but real stories, simply told from their own country.

One heart-rending story was narrated at a seminar where Arundhati Roy spoke. Roy cut short her speech and shared time with Gayatri, a young girl from a village in Madhya Pradesh. This young woman is a victim not only of a patriarchal society, but also of brutal and insensitive state machinery. She stood boldly on the stage and screamed in rage at the injustice that she faced at every step in her life.

One day, a cow was killed in front of her house, an event that was to irretrievably change Gayatri's life. In the enquiry that ensued, her family was taken to the local *thana* and kept in the lock up. The family had no hand in the killing of the cow, but instead of releasing the family, all except for Gayatri were sent to jail. She remained in the lockup. Upon nightfall the policemen gang raped her. As is usual, she was then released with the threat that if she spoke about the rape incident, the police would destroy her family and property.

Gayatri was not one to be scared by police threats. She implored the local authorities for help, but as is the sad state of our country, the state only sided with the police and refused to acknowledge her story. Instead, Gayatri's house was reduced to rubble, her land was seized by the authorities and redistributed among other people, false criminal charges were levelled against her brothers, her younger sister was constantly threatened with rape, and her son and husband with death. Gayatri and her family are marginally safer today with the help of a women's organization, but the state is yet to give her the justice that she deserves.

To narrate such a horror story to an audience of over 80,000 people require enormous courage. Gayatri mustered that courage in the hope that those present at the Forum would spread her story of injustice and wake up to the reality of the status of women in India. It is a reality where in theory a woman is raised to the level of a goddess, but in practice, the life of an animal is valued more than a woman's.

If this is the reality of India, then that of our neighbour, Afghanistan is much worse. There are many Gayatris there, but no platform for them to vent their angst. Representing RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan) was Sahar Saba, today a well-known international face. But here is a story of a woman, who like all other women in Afghanistan

today, is a daughter of war. RAWA, since its inception in 1977, operates secretly, under the threat of death, to struggle for full freedoms to the women of Afghanistan. Saba was born in Kabul; in 1979, her family fled Afghanistan to refugee camps in Pakistan to escape the Soviet invasion. Once in Pakistan, they moved again to give her an education at one of RAWA's underground schools. Now in her mid-twenties, Sahar serves on RAWA's foreign affairs committee.

This is not the space to narrate the atrocities that continue to be committed on the women of Afghanistan, but it is important to tell that there is little change in the life of Afghani women with the fall of the Taliban. Women still do not have the basic human rights to education or even freedom of speech and expression. And if all this was not enough, with regard to human rights and civil rights, the constitution of the newly formed grand assembly (Loya Jirga) explicitly lays down that women need not even try and put themselves on a level with men because 'even god has not given you equal rights...under his decision two women are counted as equal to one man.'

Clearly, the wait for justice for women across the globe is still far away. One criticism of the WSF has been that the forum was nothing but a huge 'mela' with no concrete solutions. But to say so is to ignore not only the spirit of optimism and hope that the participants shared but also the very phenomenon that gives the WSF its strength; a space for diverse democratic movements and organizations to come together, share experiences and create new ideas.

Sandhya Kumar

Multiple sites of protest

WHAT better world than an open, unlimited, democratic space, where more than a hundred different languages were spoken, and it did not take much to be understood; where victims, be it the ousted railway workers of Japan, displaced adivasis from different parts of India and sex workers rubbed shoulders in support of a dream; where music united people. Such was the world at the NESCO grounds, Mumbai, venue for the World Social Forum held from 16th to 21st of January 2004.

It was a world where information technology was not captive to monopoly capitalists but a truly emancipatory instrument, to be shared between nations and peoples bringing ideas, not commerce, on the table through the Free Software Foundation, which functions

in the belief that free information access is possible and feasible.

It is also a world where books and knowledge are to be shared – as the French activists showed through their Green Tree where pamphlets and literature could be picked (read, and returned) off a make-believe tree, of art installations demanding to be touched, felt, and become one with the viewer, without alienating. Where it took very little to get intimately involved with the joys and sorrows, hopes and disillusionment of fellow participants across culture, language, ethnicity, sex and other historically given 'qualifiers'.

Whether or not such a world will be built in some future time, that such a world could be a possibility was proved beyond doubt within six days of being – eating, living, dancing, singing, protesting – together. It is another matter, however, as to what it takes, in terms of time and resources to even sample this probability.

Despite varied historical and social contexts, it is intriguing that our entire history seems to fit into one vicious cycle of violence and displacement by casteism, racism, war and the violence of imperialist hegemony. At the same time, this history converges in the act of protest against these forces in all ages. This is what Firdous, a 20 year old from the slums of the 'old city' of Hyderabad wrote in her diary: 'From the Brazilian tent mates (at the WSF youth camp), I got to know that Brazil has a lot of problems, lot of poverty, electricity problems... this was new as I thought fair skin people are very rich!' Her impressions were also shared by many others from the rural districts in India – the safai karamcharis from Tamil Nadu and the adivasi women from Chattisgarh – that somewhere they are together in/against an exploitative global system.

'Poetics' apart, in the Indian context for the WSF to have been held at Mumbai carries economic and political significance, even though there is need to critically assess the event and its many facets.

In the current context of the privatization of health, education and communications, the displacement and impoverishment in both urban and rural areas, growing fascist tendencies and worse, a forum such as the WSF – which raised all these issues – cannot be wished away. The numbers present remind us of the numbers who protested across the globe against the war on Iraq. These numbers matter, especially in a world where media plays an important role and where more than half the media space is sold to the glamour and 'feel good'-ness of globalization. And these spaces have 'icons', faces that endorse it – sportspersons, artistes, and film/TV personalities.

In terms of participation, there was a visible increase in the presence of NGOs and funding agencies at the WSF, when compared to a similar event held in India last year, the Asian Social Forum. And this in itself may be problematic, if one considers that significant people's movements have often been taken over by the concept and structure of NGOs and funded initiatives. There was, and still is, a marked dichotomy between social activists and the NGOs in developing countries. Unfortunately, despite forums on the role of people's (political) movements and trade unions, no one session focused on the increasing distance and blurring of lines between people's movements and NGOs/funding agencies, especially when you consider that there is little clarity, even in the NGO sector, about the politics of funding, and the limitations thereof. On the other hand, if NGO structures are here to stay, what kind of another world can be visualised – will a forum like the WSF give rise to another, 'alternate funding' paradigm for the developing world, questioning the agendas of the World Bank and DFID?

These issues (perhaps understandably) did not figure at the sessions of the WSF. Funding (of WSF) as an issue was, however, raised at the alternative Mumbai Resistance forum – just across the street. But only as propaganda. In the context of global initiatives such as the WSF it is worth asking whether it is inevitable that people's movements will ultimately become part of funded campaigns with their structured programmes such as 'gender', 'displacement', 'sustainable livelihoods' which become separate, mutually exclusive activities only to end up as 'reports'/findings at meetings like the WSF.

At another level, the delicate question of difference between NGOs, political and social movements seems to have assumed a new form. The contours (once sharply drawn out) between activists and the NGOs seem to have blurred at the WSF, despite the fact that the NGO movement ever since the late '70s has contributed in many cases to a dampening of political activism as people's movements metamorphose into funded/aided projects. The sharp distinction/divide evident some years ago between grassroots activists and NGOs was not easily discernible at the WSF.

There were, however, significant sessions – not part of the funded campaigns – addressing markedly political issues, Kashmir for one, which drew a packed house. Or the session on media in the context of globalization.

Culture – literally and epistemologically – remained at the fringes at the WSF, much the same

as at the ASF. And this is indeed a problematic that movements and spaces such as these need to address. 'Cultural evenings' and cultural programmes become the 'comic relief', de-contextualized as it were. Dances, songs, theatre, seem to have no other rationale than to entertain (and for the non-Indians, a 'kaleidoscope of India'). It is indeed troubling that when it came to culture, WSF failed to adequately engage with crucial concerns – how globalization alters cultural forms or the question of universalization of symbols, images, and sounds. Even in sessions on mining and forestry, where adivasi people's lives (still believed to be rooted to their culture) and displacement was discussed, cultural hegemony and displacement were seen narrowly in dichotomous terms – adivasis versus the mainstream. There was no focus on Hinduization in the adivasi/tribal areas, or in the larger electronic media – the serials, for instance. Universal cultural symbols dominate both the interior and external landscape of the country across rural and urban areas – Coca Cola kiosks lining up the rural landscape. What does this mean in cultural terms? Some of the art installations did touch upon these ideas but they remained a singularly disconnected part of the whole affair. It may have helped to have the artists interpret and share their ideas on an issue so central to the larger debate on globalization.

The coverage of WSF in the Indian media pointed to the polarization in mainstream media vis-à-vis globalization. While one section was more inclined to either 'celebrity hunt' or offer snide remarks on the 'mela', only waking up to the WSF post the alleged rape of a South African woman delegate, another gave undiluted attention to the event without, however, a critical engagement.

Some significant fallouts can be traced in the declarations made at the WSF as also a few events that followed – the most important being the call for a world protest against the war on Iraq on the 20th of March this year. The Anti Nuclear Alliance (including groups from India, Japan, South Africa, among others) demanded an end to uranium mining across the globe 'until such day as the indigenous peoples... the custodians of the land... give unanimous, unforced... permission.' The Mumbai Forest Initiative signed by the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) called for a 'global forest movement for forest peoples' rights and forest conservation.'

The visit of French agriculturist-activist José Bové to Plachimada and George Monbiot to Hyderabad may be considered as an important follow-

up on issues of water privatization and World Bank aided development. Both these visits, immediately after the WSF, strengthened the struggle against globalization, in two states, one relating to the struggle for water rights against the giant Coca Cola and the other against a corporate governance agenda following IMF-World Bank conditionalities.

Far more significant were events such as the Dalit Swadhikar Rally, which culminated at the WSF. Spanning 33,000 kilometers across 20 states and union territories, the NCDHR led rally 'took the issue of the dalit consciousness beyond, and deeper, than any seminar or workshop would,' as Paul Divakar (representing NCDHR) put it. 'At the WSF, the Indian dalit movement merged into a pan global caste movement – with people from Nigeria, Senegal, Bangladesh and Nepal. Spaces such as these... are luxuries we cannot continuously afford... Struggles need solidarity spaces and opportunities to forge alliances.'

On democratic spaces, however, future forums will need to think through their policy on whom to include – can an open space be non-problematically 'open'? What explains, for instance, the presence of the Anand Marg at the WSF? Or the Art of Living? True, it takes all to make another world possible – believers, agnostics, atheists – but does that imply legitimacy to those who had tacitly (and otherwise) supported the fascistic Hindutva agenda?

Finally, how does one understand the significance of the WSF in today's context. Globalization and convergence of economy and markets have contributed greatly to increasing the exploitation and violence at various 'local' levels. We are at a juncture where it is difficult to delink affairs/issues of one nation from another – the liberation of Palestine, US war on Iraq, US propaganda on clash of civilizations (feeding into the Hindutva agenda against the Muslims in India), and destructive consumerism. All of these are so intertwined that a fight against one necessarily mutates into a fight against the other.

The terms global and local are now indistinguishable by virtue of globalization, both in a positive and negative sense. It is no longer difficult to imagine that we are 'one world', even if only by virtue of displacement – of cultures, peoples and practices, and marginalisation. When it comes to forging workable alliances against the dominant forces, regional forums like the ASF show greater promise. Perhaps this 'one world-ness' is all that validates and vindicates the WSF.

R. Uma Maheshwari

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Communication

Sumanta Banerjee, 'In Search of the Gandiva' (*Seminar* 533, January 2004) presents an incisive analysis of the gung-ho celebrations of our feel-good 'shining' situation, which he dubs 'unashamed hedonism'. He reminds the consumerist *biradari* of the fact that India is a land where 233 million people go hungry and over 40 million children do not go to primary schools. Our latest Census survey points out that 48% of our people are homeless, 44% make do without electricity and over 60% of families do not get water at home. When the abysmal lack of medical facilities is added to this picture, the situation cries out for comment.

Banerjee devotes considerable attention to the coexistence of 'consumerist values with traditional and conservative socio-religious norms.' He cites some pertinent data (during the last decade some 2.4 million new places of worship came up as against 1.5 million schools and colleges and 0.6 million hospitals; there are 26 million television sets in rural India) and highlights a possible link with socio-

cultural behaviour of the people like bride-burning, lynching of young couples for intercaste marriage, imposing diktats like burqua-wearing in conjunction with severe physical punishment in the event of violations, killing of women branded as witches, buying consumer goods at the expense of foods and facilities essential for a healthy and decent living. Banerjee justifiably bemoans the tendency of the majority (outside the shining club) to toe the line of 'traditional socio-religious practices, as well as... their new pursuit of modern consumerist values, however expensive both might be.'

Sumanta Banerjee suggests that a kind of hegemonic nexus between consumerism and cultural obscurantism is seeking to motor our social being. But, perhaps because of the constraints of his framework, he has not deemed it necessary to go into the phenomenon that now passes by the name of raising 'spiritual' awareness. It needs examination.

As we see, 'spirituality' hangs heavy in the air. The cognoscenti call it pop and marketplace

spirituality, but its pop status does strengthen its power to assume the mantle of a potent fashion. This fashion radiates certain messages – be positive, think positive, live at the level of pure consciousness because your true nature is consciousness and you are a part of the Absolute which is nothing but pure consciousness. These messages float in our (post) modern Indian life, which is marked by a coexistence of various shades of immorality and the popularity of the ‘need’ to go spiritual. Spirituality is simply a tendency towards a life of the spirit with all the attendant implications. Therefore, the coexistence of immorality (engendered, in a very large measure, by the pressure of consumerism) with the desire for spirituality becomes disturbing. How can consumerist values that believe in pulling the people to the market coexist with a desire to claim the eternal? The philosophy of the market rests on the principle of a gratification of the senses; the goal of spirituality is to rise above the agitation of the senses.

Human life ultimately being consciousness and so a part of a larger consciousness, is gaining increasing cognitive validation from the scientific fraternity. The tentativeness of Roger Penrose does not jar with the sublime finality of the theorem propounded in the *Isavasya Upanishad* ‘purnam adah purnam idam/purnat purnam udacyate/purnasya purnam adaya/purnam evavasisyate’. [(The absolute) is the whole, this (the universe) is the whole; from that whole emerges this whole. Take away the whole from the whole, and yet the whole remains]. But under the sky of this Truth lives the real planet of the hard actualities of real life, which creates some real socio-cultural contexts dominated by some real norms, which we may call smaller absolutes. It is these contexts and absolutes that make the prescriptive messages of today’s fashionable spirituality problematic.

Our context is the dominance of rapacious consumerism and the growing insensitivity towards the suffering of a large marginalised mass of humanity. These sufferings are aggravated, in no small measure, by the dominance of the glamour and glitz of the consumerist cultural ambience. In hard terms of day-to-day socio-cultural living, the ruling god is the god of chic advertisements, pushing us towards a market stacked with items for the body. The market has nothing for a life of the spirit. Some people try to bring soul into the market and claim that the market is a liberating place. They blissfully forget that

the essential condition of this liberation is a purse stuffed with currency notes and credit cards.

For the economically marginalised, the market can be only a prison-house with glass walls on which they see the reflection of their own wretchedness. This prison-house is not just a physical presence; it has transformed itself into a regime with a norm and a penal code, regularly drummed into us by market PR systems represented by the huge advertising industry. The norm is to buy and go on buying; the penal code says that those who can’t buy are not accredited citizens. The norm and the penal code also have their sub-clauses about those who have a modicum of money but refuse to splurge on market-directed hardware, because they consider the finer software of life more precious. But fortunately, they are capable of defending themselves and their territory. Such people can gain heart from the intellectual efforts of people like Sumanta Banerjee.

This context has a triangular palpability, with all the three angles gaining salience with the passage of time. Avarice, materialism and corruption are the new character traits of our era. What role does the reigning brand of ‘spirituality’ play here? How do these three angles interact with and react to the message of think positive, be positive, don’t worry, be happy? The inescapable answer is that greed and endemic corruption coexist with what goes by the name of spirituality in the common parlance of today’s permissive society. The reason for this is that our ‘domain of the popular’ (Partha Chatterjee’s term) lacks a serious movement advocating the primacy of the spirit. Therefore, the wordy miasma of spiritual messages serve, at best, the desire to forget the irksome experience of immorality for material gain. The emphasis is on therapeutic power, the tension-reducing potential of spiritual practices.

The core of these practices – *yamas* (the vows of self-restraint which prescribe, among other values, abstention from acquisitiveness) and *niyamas* (vows of observances which include among other ideals, contentment and austerity) remain grossly overlooked. The concept of spirituality has been dumbed down to the level of a stress-busting instrumentality. The result is there for all to see. Tax evasion, appointments with ‘spiritual’ consultants and attendance in *pravachan sabhas* are registering simultaneous growth. A lip service to a life of the spirit goes hand in hand with an affirmation of materialistic values. In the face of the triumphant march of these values, one is reminded of the

sociological position that holds that social phenomena have an independent reality and precede and survive individuals, influencing their behaviour by providing them with beliefs, values and motivations.

This ‘dumbing down’ is reflective of our diluted socio-cultural existence. The views of Professor Morris Berman advanced in his book *The Twilight of American Culture*, though written in the immediate context of American society, strike a resonance, considering our enthusiastic ride on the globalisation bandwagon. According to the sociologist Todd Gotlin, American popular culture is ‘the latest in a long succession of bidders for global unification’ (*The Times of India*, Mumbai, 31 October 1998). Using concrete indicators, like the number of Americans reading a daily newspaper becoming half since 1965, 40% of American adults not being able to name America’s Second World War enemies, and about 120 million Americans reading and writing English language at the level of an 11-year old, Berman asks, ‘Why did we get so preoccupied with the soul?’ and answers, ‘Because we are so dumb we can’t think of anything else.’ He is of the opinion that best-selling books like *Chicken Soup for the Soul* are the markers of the new ‘dumb society’.

An intellectually retarded society is one where pop spirituality takes birth and, in turn, needs it for its sustenance and growth, as such a society has high fertility for mediocrity. Mediocrity is not about being average, it is conforming to the average. Real mediocrity takes place when conforming to the average becomes the highest meaning in life. Then, to fit in and succeed in society by whatever means and be happy becomes the guiding motto of life. A situation of cultural stasis prevails which some evolutionary philosophers call a ‘conspiracy of mediocrity’. Further, such a society cannot be healthy in cardiovascular terms because the waning of intellectualism leads to an acceptance of the values that agitate rather than calm the mind.

Paramhansa Yogananda, in his widely discussed autobiography, establishes the superiority of intellectual activities in terms of their beneficial effects. He writes, ‘A person whose attention is wholly engrossed, as in following some closely knit intellectual argument... automatically breathes slowly. Fixity of attention depends on slow breathing; quick or uneven breaths are an inevitable accompaniment of harmful emotional states: fear, lust, anger.’ (*Autobiography of a Yogi*, Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, 2001, p. 240). Yasuhiko

Kimura, the Japanese-American author of *Think Kosmically Act Globally*, often tells his students to ask themselves a question for which they have no answer, or read a book that they cannot readily understand. He believes that by the time they are able to do so, they have evolved. He equates it with an identical process in biological evolution. He upholders the salutary effect of positive stress on the psychosomatic human system.

Consumerism and the market embed anxiety in daily life because they motivate and cause people to spend rather than save. The culture of runaway consumerism puts the individual on a never-ending, ever-accelerating treadmill of desire, their fulfillment and more desire. The famous cartographer of consciousness, Ken Wilber, diagnoses the present cultural disposition toward happiness as ‘simply pluralism infected with narcissism’, meaning hyper-relativity about values and acute self-centredness. The present me-generation gives ultimate priority to wanting to feel better, not by grounding the subjective self in a shared relationship with the suffering humanity, but by decontextualizing it from the vortex of the hard realities of life.

The peddlers of spirituality forget that recognition that life is suffering led the Buddha to his enlightenment. Buddha’s concern was humanity, not ‘myself’. Max Bennett, the world-renowned neurologist, has captured the fate of a ‘decentred’ and ‘decontextualised’ egoism: ‘We know that by the year 2020, the greatest disabling phenomenon for the health of the human race will be depression.’

True and timeless spirituality must act now and demand a comprehensive and intensive audit. Because if the unification envisaged by Todd Gotlin comes about, a frightening destiny awaits us. Even Francis Fukuyama admits that ‘the end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems... and satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands.’ (‘The End of History?’, p. 18, *The National Interest*, Vol. 16, Summer 1989). One hopes that true spirituality will intervene, force society to change gear and make another destiny possible.

R.P. Singh
Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh

Backpage

YOU can trust HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi. As both canny politician and self-confessed ideologue of Vedic greatness, he has rarely disappointed. Ever since he assumed charge of this vast ministry, short on funds but high on patronage dispensing potential, he has single-mindedly pursued his agenda, ignoring the ever-growing tribe of detractors.

Convinced that the country's 'great' educational infrastructure needed to be cleansed of the unholy nexus of Macaulayites and Marxists (liberals included), he has wielded his broom in every institution controlled by the ministry. ICHR, ICSSR, UGC, IIAS, NCERT – and the list can be expanded, have been touched by his evangelical zeal. Replace chairpersons and board members, rewrite textbooks in particular of history, introduce Vedic studies and glorify tradition, arbitrarily rewrite rules and revoke grants where people do not fall in line – the range of instrumentalities deployed to mould the country's past and future is truly impressive.

Of course such an agenda engenders resistance, more so since few of the henchmen charged with the task have so far displayed the needed sophistication. On such occasions, the favoured strategy is to focus on the peccadilloes of previous, read Congress, regimes. It helps that both the late Nurul Hasan and Arjun Singh make for easy punching bags.

Barring the occasional hiccup, the unusually 'smooth' run so far seems to have emboldened the minister and his advisors into becoming more ambitious. And therein lies his error – a tendency to over-reach. Possibly, irritated with Prime Minister Vajpayee's hegemonising the 'Shining India' campaign, he has now decided to take on the 'mascots' of India's claim to global greatness – the Indian Institutes of Management.

Never mind the V. Kurien report which years back recommended a phased reduction of subsidies to higher, particularly professional, education, or even his own assertion, as recently as 1999, echoing a similar sentiment that 'students should pay or decay'. Blatantly misrepresenting the recommendations of the U.R. Rao Committee, the ministry has unilaterally decided that fees to the IIMs will now be pegged at Rs 30,000 a year starting 2004-05.

That this will vastly increase the subsidy to the six IIMs, even as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme, crucial to meeting the UEE targets by 2010, is languishing for lack of funds, evidently does not matter. Nor does the fact that these institutes have by now built up

a corpus and are in a position to reduce dependence on government grants.

Simultaneously, he also wants an increase in student strength and in the student-teacher ratio, convinced that the faculty is under-utilised. Protests by these institutions – students, faculty, board – that the proposals will be detrimental to teaching quality, that no student of an IIM has suffered due to lack of finance (both loans and scholarships are easily available), and that this constitutes gross interference in the autonomy of the institutes, have so far been brushed aside. What instead we are told is that the move will permit larger numbers to break into the elite club of managers and add to our burgeoning middle class. Further, the low fee structure will dissuade 'foreign' players from entering the Indian educational market – a blow for *swadeshi*?

Since Professor Joshi, despite continuing on the faculty of Allahabad University, stopped teaching many years back, he evidently has little clue of what makes a good teaching/research institution. The pegging of fees or the extent of public subsidy is only part of the equation. Of greater relevance is the institutional autonomy to design curricula and modify pedagogy, hire faculty and select students, evolve programmes and create an environment where striving for excellence becomes a norm rather than a rarity.

All this takes time. Constantly having to look over one's shoulder and develop skills to accommodate the whimsical fancies of political masters is hardly conducive to quality or developing a strategic vision. Nor is falling prey to the disease of mindless expansionism. But politicians and bureaucrats would not be true to their calling if they are constrained from demonstrating their power and 'superior' understanding. And if they are ideologically fixated, they prefer centralisation. Nothing else explains these retrograde proposals to further whittle away the autonomy of our institutions.

If the IIMs today enjoy a brand equity, it is by following the norms instituted by the founding fathers – Vikram Sarabhai and Ravi Mathai. Instead of deepening them, if our politicians and bureaucrats decide to extend control – over student selection procedures and fees, faculty deployment and curriculum, using the leverage of public funding – we will only be adding to the growing list of dysfunctional institutions. It is time we learn to leave well enough alone. Truly, India is shining.

Harsh Sethi

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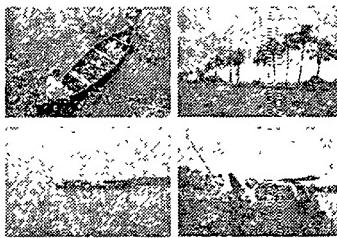
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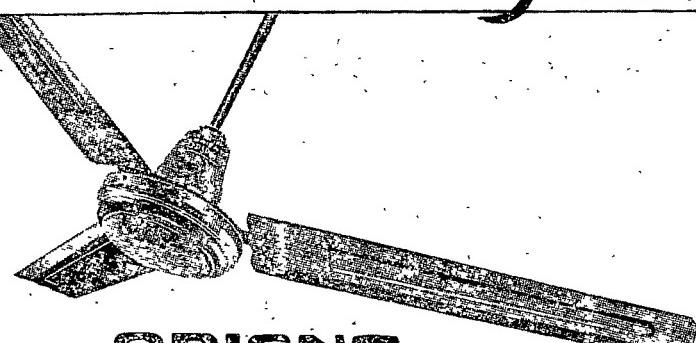


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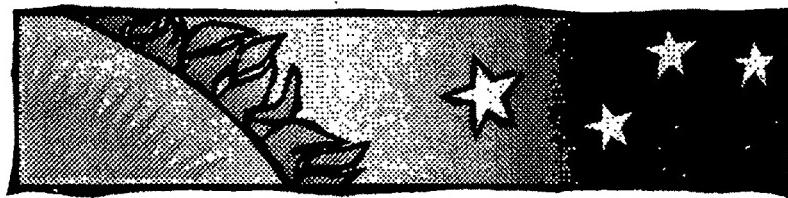
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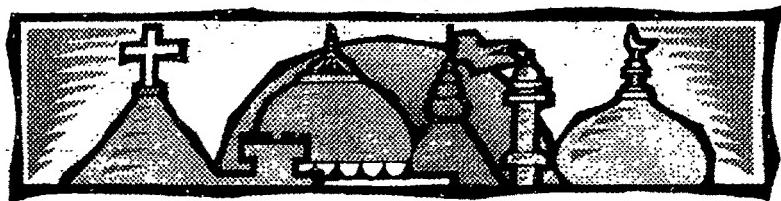
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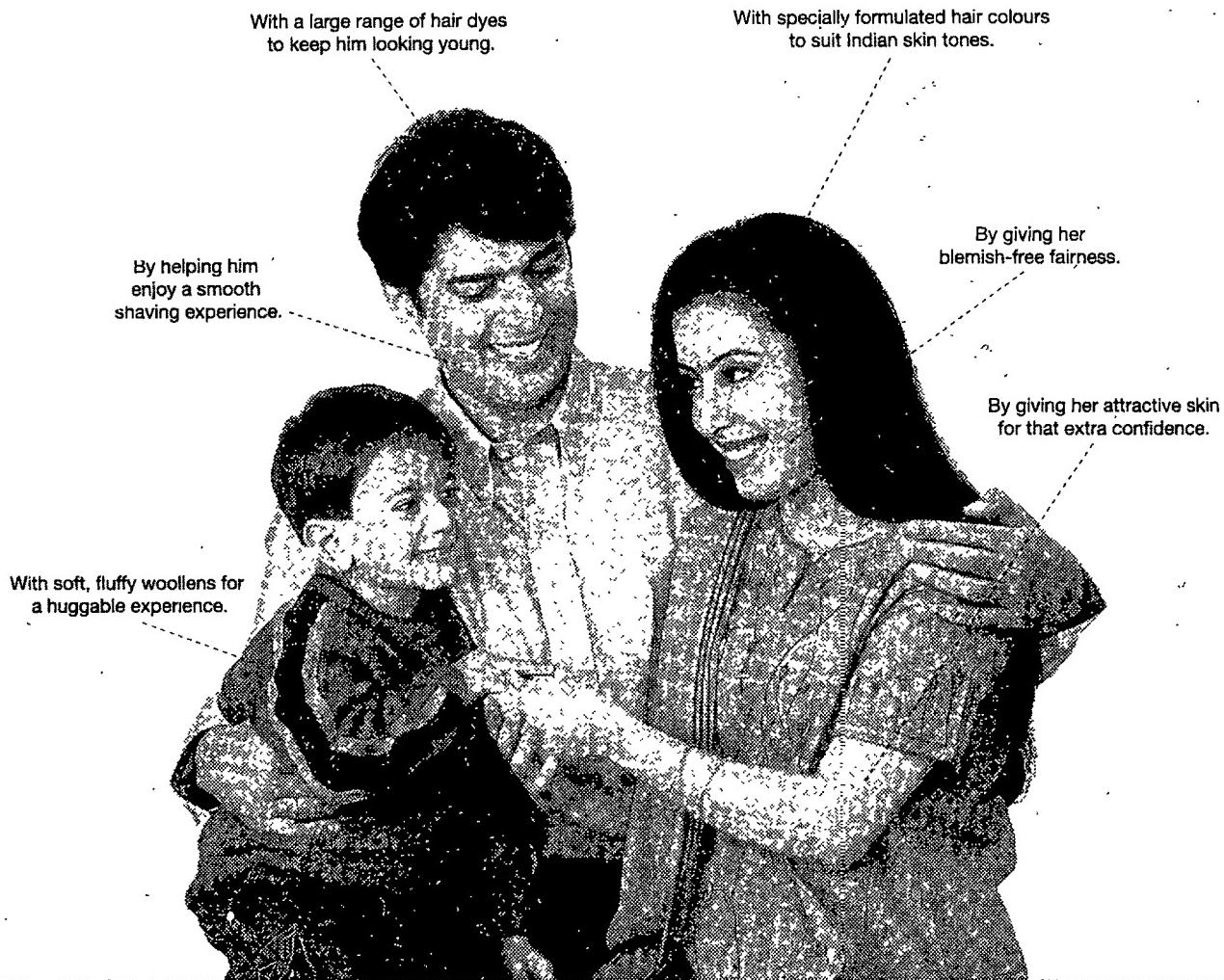


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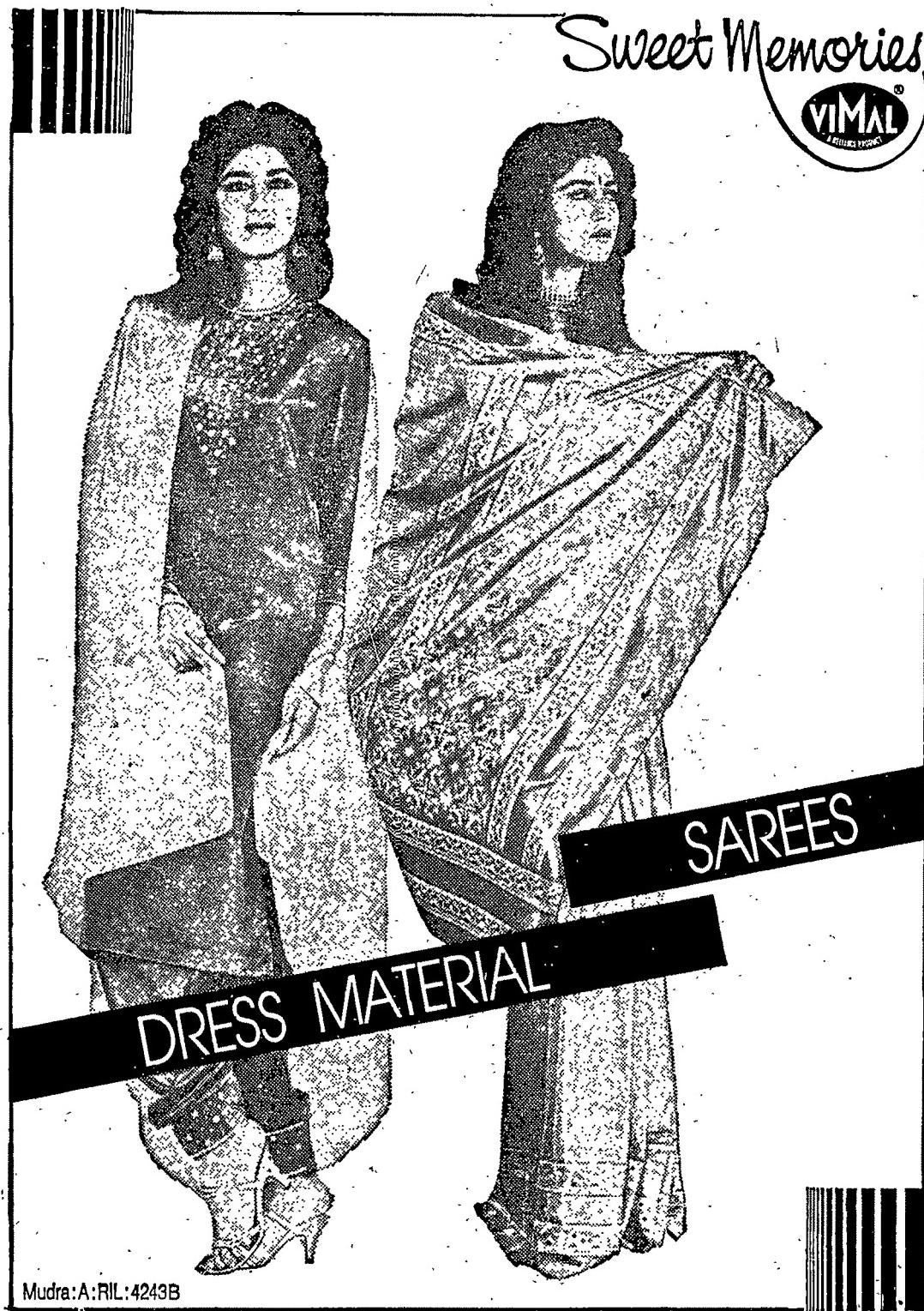
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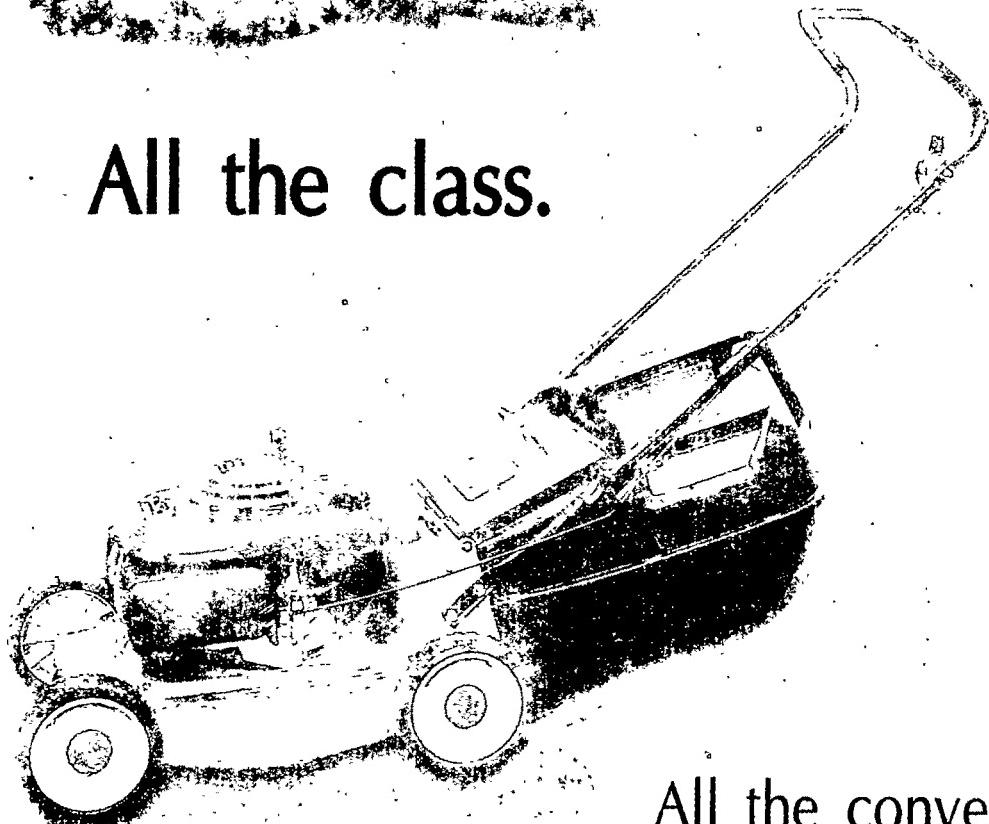


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Designed by Akila Seshasayee

The problem

IT is hardly surprising that accounts and assessments of India's educational performance, in particular meeting the constitutional mandate to provide 'free and compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14 years,' remain deeply divided. Even as officials of the Ministry of Human Resources Development underscore the tremendous progress of the last five decades despite the scarcity of resources and the immensity of the task inherited at independence, critics continue to focus on the many gaps and unfinished business, citing among other, the most recent Unesco report. They also remind us that the constitutional commitment, despite being included in the Directive Principles of State Policy and not the Fundamental Rights chapter, came accompanied by a target date, 1960, and how this date has been pushed back every decade, currently standing at 2015.

We are also reminded of the vast number of children who continue to remain out of school, that many who do join drop out, and that significant numbers learn little even after completing the primary cycle. As if this was not sufficiently depressing, detailed research indicates that the picture varies across class, caste, gender and locality with those on the margins faring significantly worse than the better-off. Finally, to underscore the lack of political will among the governing classes and continuing apathy marking the elite, are accounts about the questionable state of the government primary school – the woefully inadequate infrastructure (school buildings, toilets, playgrounds, even drinking water), absence of teaching-learning materials, and the shortage of trained and motivated teachers. Evidently, dozens of reports – from the Radhakrishnan to the Kothari Commission and most recently the National Education Policy – have failed

to make quality education for our children a compelling enough priority.

If official statistics are to be taken at face value, this description no longer holds true. The decade of the nineties seems to have witnessed a dramatic increase in literacy levels, school enrolment and retention rates, decline in dropouts, increase in the number of teachers and schools and a major escalation of public funding for education. With the state shedding its earlier unease about external assistance in elementary education, this phase has seen a plethora of donor-assisted programmes, both bilateral and multilateral. In addition, the last few years have also drawn in the corporate sector. This collective endeavour has even nudged the political class into moving a constitutional amendment for declaring education as a fundamental right, incidentally approved by the Rajya Sabha.

So, are we finally on the right track? Is it likely that the lessons from the many researches, experiments and innovations, both in the official system and outside, will finally bear fruit? Such exuberance may, in all likelihood, be somewhat premature. True, the educational discourse has moved away from the earlier lament about an insufficient demand for schooling and learning, particularly among the poor, socially marginalized and girls. Nevertheless, the disquiet with what children actually learn remains deep. It is also evident that a crucial reason why, despite an eagerness to learn and even a willingness to pay, children drop out of school or attend irregularly is because they find the experience in schools deeply dissatisfying.

Only in part is this due to inadequate infrastructure or the shortage of teachers, particularly women teachers, pushing student-teacher ratios to unacceptably high levels and forcing schools into multi-grade

classes. It is equally because the school environment remains iniquitous and discriminatory vis-a-vis both the socially marginal communities and girls. Above all, is our collective failure to engage pedagogically with the child. This despite all educational documents being peppered with politically correct and evocative phrases like joyful and child-centred learning.

There is another problem, inadequately addressed both in research and policy. Today we have a wide variety of schools that have come up not merely as a response to a differentiated market demand, but policy. Forget for a moment the schools for the elite. For the common citizen we have the government primary schools, alternative (shiksha karmi, education guarantee) schools, aided and unaided private schools and so on. The stratification in schools both mirrors and further entrenches social stratification such that different schools, instead of catering to a heterogeneous group are dealing with cohesive groupings defined by income, caste and ethnicity. One implication of this 'hierarchies of access' is that the most deprived, and thus the most in need for the best education, usually end up receiving the least attention. A far cry from the common school system recommended both by the Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commissions.

Equally disingenuous has been the obsession with targets and statistics. For years now, the provincial governments responsible for elementary education have remained resource strapped, with well over 90% of their budgets devoted to meeting teacher salaries, and this too haltingly. Innovations and improvements were possible only as a result of central, and of late, external donor assistance. This created not only the problems associated with a donor-driven agenda and policy, but a fracturing of the effort with different funders pushing

their favoured solutions. It simultaneously led to increasing pressure to report compliance on targets, most of which incidentally relate to inputs not outcomes. Possibly this is why, despite a multiplication of schemes addressing diverse problems through different agencies, it has proved difficult to focus on the simple and obvious task – that of generating and nurturing an environment which helps the child to learn.

In a vast and diverse country such as ours, it is not difficult to discover positive and success stories. The involvement of non-officials – community groups, NGOs, corporates – and the comparative experience made available through the participation of external donors, has clearly energized the once dispirited government primary school system. The introduction of bridge courses and rapid learning programmes designed specifically for dropouts and the never-enrolled children have undoubtedly helped, as have new and better textbooks and workbooks. Regions with active involvement of panchayats and community groups (parent-teacher associations, mother's groups) have increased participation with school management, improving accountability and performance – be it mid-day meal schemes, school repair and building programmes or arranging supplementary learning and extra-curricular activities for children. Examples can be multiplied. The concern is whether our system(s) are willing and able to draw upon these lessons and translate the many but scattered efforts into better quality education.

Basic education is a necessity, not just instrumentally, but in itself. It can, and must be, fun, a joy. It would indeed be tragic if once again we let time slip by or let decision-makers off the hook. This issue of Seminar debates what is involved.

The best of times, the worst of times

VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN

THESE are the best of times and the worst of times, times when we are presented drastically different scenarios and hear sharply contrasting stories. Pouring over educational statistics from a variety of sources—Census and Sample Surveys (NFHS, NSSO)—one feels upbeat about the progress in literacy levels and primary school enrolment in the decade of the 1990s. So too when we read government documents that bestow elementary education as a fundamental right, allocate substantial funds to elementary education and reiterate commitment to close all gender and social equity gaps in accessing quality education. All seems to be on track with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Yet, if one travels around the country, in rural hamlets and urban slums, the ground situation seems a far cry from national or even state level statistics.

Let me start with the more promising areas of the country. During a visit to EGS (Education Guarantee Scheme) and government primary schools in Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh (November 2003), I found a lot of children in school, packed to the brim in a brightly coloured building. Teachers were having to manage over 50 children of different classes in the

same room, trying to maintain some semblance of order. Browsing through their notebooks and observing their work it was obvious that many of them—even in class III and IV—could barely read and write. Yes children are definitely coming to school and yes the teachers are also present, but one is left wondering how many will actually complete the primary cycle with requisite skills.

Similarly, I made a surprise stopover in a few government primary schools in Banswara district of Rajasthan in February 2004. Again, government primary schools were functioning, children were there in full force, and teachers were present, yet it is difficult to say if learning was happening. Parents lamented that in the old days even a class V child could read newspapers, but now even a matric pass could not do so! The scenario in Babu land was no different—enrolment of children between the ages of 6–14 stands at 96%; the state dropout rate is as high as 72% between classes I–X.

Given the multi-grade teaching situation in a majority of primary schools, especially in rural/backward areas, the actual teaching time is fairly low. Single and two teacher schools

are more prevalent in areas where literacy levels are low and where most of the children are first generation school goers. In some states like Rajasthan the number and intensity of non-teaching duties of teachers (oversee self-help groups, surveys and campaigns, human and cattle census) has increased in the last five years. Teachers in Ajmer (August 2003) admit that actual teaching is as low as 140 days in some schools. The tragedy is not that there is no demand for education or that people do not recognise the value of education in the overall growth and development of their children. Rather that children who do enrol are pushed from one grade to the next, thanks to the no-detention policy. After five years they emerge with rudimentary skills, if at all.

Let us turn to a region that has seen many innovative efforts in the last 15 years. I visited a number of schools and alternative educational programmes in Korta block of Udaipur district of Rajasthan in August 2003. The Lok Jumbish Parishad has been working in this block for several years, running a number of alternative education centres (Sahaj Shiksha Kendra, Balika Shikshan Kendra). A few well-known NGOs of Rajasthan (Astha, Sewa Mandir) also work in this area. Yet, nearly all social development indicators—immunisation, child mortality, infant mortality, and maternal mortality—are well below state average. Korta remains one of the most backward blocks of Rajasthan, recording a dismal literacy rate of 37.55% for males and a shocking 11.44% for females (Census 2001).

The education department and Lok Jumbish project personnel admit, that many formal primary schools do not function as teachers are either not available or absent. What is worse is that the actual teaching time is abys-

mally low—in schools we visited, each group of children (in a multi-grade situation) were taught for as little as 25 minutes a day and 140 days in the year. The worst were the night schools that officially run for two to three hours in dim light. We were informed that over two-thirds of children attending night schools are girls! Discussions with women in the area revealed that they want to send their children—girls and boys—to school, but are at a loss in a situation where schools are dysfunctional. As a result of the ‘political correctness’ associated with women’s empowerment, there is a tremendous push for residential bridge courses for girls and parents ask why such residential camps are not being organized for boys. All this in an area where we are often told that poverty, children’s workload and social barriers come in the way of enrolment and regular participation.

In a recent study analysing the factors that facilitate or impede successful primary school completion among children in diverse poverty situations in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, we observed that most children in classes III, IV and V were neither able to read fluently from their textbooks, nor could they solve simple addition or subtraction sums. Most children in class II were unable to recognise alphabets or numerals; children in class III were also unable to read, write or count, though they knew certain lessons by rote.

‘Earlier class II pass students could read postcards, now they can’t even write their names,’ complained a father during the focus group discussions (FGD) in urban Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh. ‘What is the use of sending him to school? I pulled him out after class IV and he now helps me with my work.’ The situation was not dramatically different in Karnataka

or in Andhra Pradesh. Yes, a few more could read, but on further investigation we realised that children with literate parents (especially mother) or those who attend private tuition classes were the ones most able to read.

Children who are first generation school goers barely manage to recognise alphabets and can, at best, read a few words. Group discussions in the community revealed that parents feel that the quality of teaching has declined, that the community teachers do not really care if the children of the poor learn to read or not. Also, teachers are not made accountable for learning outcomes of children, especially in the primary and middle schools where there are no board examinations.

The NFHS data reveals that overall 79% of children in the age group of 6-14 were attending school in 1998-99, up from 69% in 1992-93. School attendance varies across states – more than 90% attend school in Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, while the figure stands at less than 60% in Bihar in the 6-14 age group (NFHS II, 1998). Attendance rates too vary across different age groups – they decline as we move towards higher ages. This is more marked for girls in rural areas, where they decline from 75.1% for 6-10 years, to 61.6% for 11-14 years, and 32.8% for 15-17 years.

This is symptomatic of not only the traditionally backward states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, but also for Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. This highlights yet again the problematic nature of transition and retention in higher classes for girls, especially in rural areas. (NFHS I and II). The situation is particularly bleak in tribal areas, in urban slums and for children of communities who are at the bottom of the social ladder. The situation in

these areas is fairly predictable – extreme poverty, low investment in primary education, low adult literacy, dysfunctional or poorly functioning schools, low learning achievements and high drop out rate.

There are wide discrepancies between the percentage of boys and girls completing primary school – according to NFHS II data, 100% enrolled children completed primary school in Kerala, 82% in Maharashtra and 86% Tamil Nadu as compared to 28% in Bihar, 30% in Rajasthan and 26% in West Bengal. Slightly more than a third of the population in the age group of 9-11 (or in some states 10-12) has completed primary school. Moreover, for girls, socially disadvantaged groups, and those in rural areas, completion rates are lower. The Select Educational Statistics (GOI, 2002) reveal that 59 million children in the 6-14 age group are still out of school, out of which 35 million, i.e., approximately 59% are girls. Equally disturbing is the distribution of out of school children by social group and by location. According to NFHS II, rural girls belonging to disadvantaged groups like SC and ST are perhaps the worst off with a staggering 50% and 56% respectively having dropped out. Male-female differences are highest among the poorest quintiles of our population in both rural and urban areas.

Recent studies point out that schools located in different localities in the same village are endowed differently in terms of infrastructure, teacher-pupil ratio, training and capacity building of teachers. There is also a significant difference in the quality of schools that come directly under the education department and those run by social or tribal welfare departments and more recently alternative schools that come under the purview of panchayats. For example, the primary

schools that come under the Adi Dravida Welfare Board in Tamil Nadu do not get the same inputs as those under the education department. Similarly, the Rajiv Gandhi Pathashala schools (Rajasthan) run in a single rented room while the regular primary schools may have up to four rooms! Thankfully, residential schools run under social welfare and tribal departments in Andhra Pradesh are well-endowed. Investment in infrastructure, teacher-pupil ratio, academic inputs (teacher training, teaching learning material) for alternative programmes like EGS, Rajiv Gandhi Pathashala, and Shishu Shiksha Kendra is appreciably less than the regular primary schools.

It is not that the situation is uniformly bad across the country or even for different social groups living in the same area. The real problem is that as we go down the social and economic pyramid, access and quality issues become far more pronounced. The vast numbers of the very poor in rural and urban India have to rely on government schools of different types. The relatively better off in rural and urban India either access better-endowed government schools or opt for private aided and unaided schools.

Let us look at the education scene in the capital, New Delhi. While municipal schools in the resettlement colonies have run down buildings or are housed in torn tents, unmotivated teachers and an indifferent educational environment, special municipal schools like Navyug schools/NDMC schools are better endowed and closely monitored. Almost all government employees – especially class IV and III – send their children to Kendriya Vidyalaya or NDMC schools. Equally, those working in the armed forces too access better-run government schools. As a result, people who

have the ability to demand and ensure the proper functioning of ordinary municipal schools have no stake in it. As we go slightly higher in the bureaucracy, officials in government and related agencies send their children to private aided schools that offer reasonable quality education. The *crème de la crème* opts for elite schools; the government subsidizes some like Sanskriti School by allocating prime land in the heart of the city!

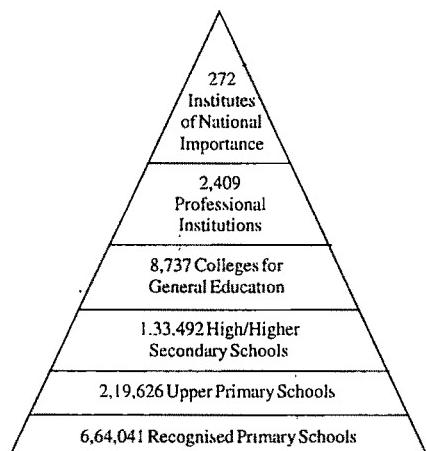
As a result, children at the bottom of the pyramid who enrol in poor quality primary schools have a slim chance of competing with their peers from the higher echelons of society. They drop out earlier and even if they continue, barely learn anything. As a result they are either pushed into lower paying jobs or into the informal sector. Education does not really add much value to their overall development or life skills.

Schooling is fast emerging as a social norm across the country. There is a hunger for education. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (low literacy areas) have seen an exponential growth in the number of private schools – almost every village/hamlet now boasts of some kind of teaching shop. First generation school goers, who account for an overwhelming proportion of the poorest of the poor, have really no choice. They either have to supplement their education through private tuition or make do with what they learn or, more often, do not.

There is another insidious pyramid in education. A cursory look at educational statistics of 2001-02 reveals a disturbing picture. There are 6,64,041 recognised primary schools, 2,19,626 upper primary schools and 1,33,492 high schools in India. As we go higher there are only 8737 colleges for general education, 2409 professional institutions and 272 institutions

of national importance! (GOI, Department of Education, MHRD website). This essentially implies that there is only one upper primary school for three primary schools and one high school for approximately five primary schools. Since these figures do not include alternative/EGS primary schools, the situation may actually be more alarming. Given that the competition to enrol at higher levels is tougher, children from poor quality government formal and alternative schools are the ones who are left out – almost as if by design.

OppORTUNITIES for post middle school or post-secondary vocational/technical/para-professional courses (public health, auxiliary nurse-midwife, animal husbandry, agriculture, child development) are limited (there is no comprehensive information on the number and spread of such institutions). Children who complete middle or even high school are left with almost no opportunity for continuing their education or acquiring employment or self-employment skills that could enable them to eke out a livelihood. Worse, there is no comprehensive policy to address the educational and training needs of educated youth.



Source: GOI, Department of Education, MHRD website, December 2003.

The prognosis is clear. Ordinary middle and high school education is not enough. Given the changing scenario in the country – especially with respect to the educational aspirations of people – we have to seriously think about and plan for post-middle school and post-secondary education and training opportunities. Equally, linking education to empowerment (self-esteem/self-confidence), survival (for employment/self-employment), awareness of social, political and community issues and rights as citizens can yield handsome results for a country that is experiencing unprecedented social as well as economic transformation. However, instead of addressing real issues that confront us in a changing world, our educational planners and administrators are still caught in a time warp.

It is indeed the best time to make a decisive shift in the way education is envisioned – the demand side has never looked more promising. The overwhelming evidence emanating from studies done in the last 10 years clearly demonstrates that there is a tremendous demand for education – across the board and among all social groups. Wherever the government has ensured a well-functioning school within reach, enrolment has been high.

What is the way forward? First, access without quality is meaningless and quality is the essence of equity. There is little point in pushing children into schools if we cannot simultaneously gear the system to ensure children acquire reading, writing and cognitive skills appropriate for each level of education. This necessitates a multi-pronged strategy of bringing about changes in curriculum, classroom transactions, teacher training, classroom environment, teacher attitudes and school-community linkages. Working on any one these without

addressing related issues does not lead to significant improvement in the learning outcomes of children.

Second, create multiple exit points, from high school onwards whereby children can access a wide range of technical/vocational skills (including agriculture, horticulture, public health, nursing, infrastructure development, credit and banking, natural resource management, and so on). Careful context specific planning has to be based on rigorous exploration of employment or self-employment opportunities and the natural resource base in the region. This is essential if we are to link education and training to productive work.

Such programmes have to be rooted in the knowledge about their area, economic opportunities and social and cultural life of the community. Forging forward linkages is critical because this will act as a suction pump propelling the community to invest in the education of their children. Conversely, an absence of forward linkages could lead to disappointment and disinterest in education per se. A lot more planning is necessary to cater to the varied educational needs of a growing number of elementary school students. Equally, such planning is essential to meet the demands of a fast changing economy.

Third, the challenge before us is so enormous that people in government have to work closely with the business and development community. Strategies have to be context specific – the basket of programmes that may be appropriate for Tamil Nadu or Andhra Pradesh may not work in Bihar and Rajasthan. Current approaches to district planning are woefully inadequate – the state government and district administration needs far greater autonomy to tailor the education system – especially the post-elementary edu-

cation and training programmes – to the specific social and economic opportunities of the area.

While affirmative action by way of reservations and special provisions does have a role to play, it is more than evident that in the last 55 years people from socially deprived communities (except for a tiny section) have remained at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. Indifferent educational institutions ensure that their literacy, numeracy, cognitive and critical thinking abilities remain poor. They enter adolescence and adulthood with little hope and are quickly sucked into a battle for survival that leaves little room for self-development. This reinforces prevalent ambivalence about appropriateness of formal education beyond the elementary level. India cannot hope to make a breakthrough unless the entire chain that binds education is addressed in totality. Piecemeal approaches have not worked in the past and are unlikely to do so in the future.

Can the government and leaders in civil society meet the challenge?

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Is it really possible?

AMARJEET SINHA

'IT is noteworthy that among the several articles in part-IV, only Article 45 speaks of a time limit, no other article does. Has it no significance? Is it a mere pious wish, even after 44 years of the Constitution?' asked the judges, while declaring education up to the age of 14 years to be a fundamental right in the J.P. Unni Krishnan Case 1993. The judges agreed with the statement in the Bandhua Mukti Morcha case that 'right to education is implicit in and flows from the right to life guaranteed by Article 21.'

*The views expressed are entirely personal.

This landmark judgement transformed an incremental developmental goal set by the National Policy of Education 1986, of 'universal elementary education of satisfactory quality by the turn of the century', into an entitlement of all children up to the age of 14 years. By clearly rejecting economic capacity arguments for elementary education, the Supreme Court demanded a sense of urgency from the state, defined in Article 12 of the Constitution as 'the national, state and the local government'. The Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999) reiterated that the financial implications of a fundamental right to elementary education is well within the national commitment of 6 % GDP for the education sector.

What has happened since then? Have things really moved? Is it really possible to make elementary education a fundamental right? Do we have the political will to have adequate number of publicly funded, well-equipped schools that are more accountable, attractive and autonomous? Does not the rise of large scale privately funded schools tell a tale of the decline of the public system and the growing inequalities in society?

Do we really reflect on the learning needs of the diversity of under 14 children and provide for a range of interventions to meet their learning needs? Are we doing enough to improve the health of children and reduce the poverty of households to improve the successful completion of schooling by poor children? Are girls really welcome in schools and have parents accepted their right to basic education? Can mindsets of teachers that poor children will never learn, ever change? Does a constitutional amendment making elementary education a fundamental right really alter anything?

How will a central legislation help? Isn't the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan's goal of eight years of elementary schooling for all by 2010 an ambitious one? Will we ever encourage education for life in schools? What about the difficult regions like Bihar, UP, Orissa, with their large out of school children? Can the success of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh be replicated in these backward regions as well? Will we ever succeed in improving the management of education by making it transparent, effective and efficient? Will teachers finally stop running after postings?

We are in 2004, a year after 2003 when all 6-14 age children were to be in school – education guarantee schools/alternate schools/back to school camps/bridge courses – had Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan goals been achieved. Information gathered from states as well as independent studies does suggest a significant decline in the number of out of school children, that the number of 6-14 age out of school children is down to 10 million from nearly 40 million in 1998-99. The evidence about children in school and learning, however, is still unsatisfactory, as demonstrated by weak reading and writing skills even in classes III and IV.

Has something happened over the last decade to change our perceptions, to indicate that it is possible to honour the right to elementary education? Is there an emerging political will pushing for universal elementary education? Do politicians consider quality basic education important to their vote gathering agenda? Has basic education begun to be understood as the only sustainable way of promoting social justice? Will the learning aspirations of 200 million children in the 6-14 age group be honoured? Is the quest for schooling

going to translate into education, learning and completion for all?

As recently as 1998-99, only 43% girls and 56% boys completed elementary education in the 15-19 age group. Clearly, there is some distance to cover if the goal of eight years of successful completion of elementary education by 2010 is to be achieved. The large inter-state differences in 6-14 age girls attending schools (54.1% in Bihar in 1998-99 as compared to 97.4% in Kerala in the same year), the gaps in performance of children belonging to SC/ST families as compared to others (NSS 1997), makes SSA goals appear daunting indeed.

For a country that as recently as 1986-87 (42nd Round NSS) had 42% of its children in rural areas that never enrolled in school, 7-8% enrolled but discontinued and only 50% currently enrolled, the failure of basic education in the first four decades of freedom is shocking. But is the state of affairs really so dismal so as to kill all hope? Has something changed in the latter half of the 1990s that generates some hope?

The regional differences begin to blur on the issue of learning achievements. Children are not learning enough even in the so-called educationally better off states like Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Studies on completion, on learning and figures of children securing more than 60% at class V level continue to be a serious challenge for the schooling revolution. There is a long way from school going to translate into effective learning. This calls for an even more serious assessment of what we want children to learn and to assess whether the formal schooling system builds on or breaks the context of learning from the natural, cultural and social environment of the children. Learning can only be reinforced by the use of greater flexibility in curricu-

lum, language, diverse learning materials in local cultural contexts and most of all, greater focus on individual learning needs of children with a framework that allows them to develop at their own pace with additional support when required.

The issue of relevance of basic education has also been highlighted by many critiques of universal elementary education. The principle of *samanvaya* (integration of mental and physical development) so critical to the Gandhian basic education system, needs to be revisited, especially in the light of a common perception that links education to a narrow pursuit of white collar employment. The failure of basic education to develop respect for physical/manual labour is a serious one as it interferes with the notion of education, not only for learning skills but for life. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an opportunity to re-visit the issue of relevance, especially at the upper primary level.

The last decade has seen a strong articulation for education from the poorest households. Even low cost, functional initiatives have attracted children in large numbers, despite a series of bad rainfall years. Poor parents perceive value in education and are willing to make adjustments to support their children, including girls, in schools. The demand for basic education facility in every habitation has become a symbol of social assertion with hitherto unprivileged communities demanding a school of their own, however under-funded it may be.

Travelling in the remote corners of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa or Jharkhand, one is struck by the enthusiasm in the community for local education, low cost, local teacher run facility. Tribal girls in a Balika Shikshan Shivir in Baran

district of Rajasthan, tribal girls from the KBK districts of Orissa in low cost hostels, child labour in back to school camps of MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, the community enthusiasm for special summer camps for reading skills for urban deprived children by Pratham in Mumbai, Delhi and other cities, all tell a tale of community assertion for quality schooling. Is the state responding adequately? Are mindsets changing? Are adequate resources being provided and matched with effective decentralization and school autonomy? Are the demands of poor people for quality education being reflected in national and state level resource allocation? Do poor people really matter?

Clearly, the formal system is taking a long time to improve its accountability. Education administrators are still grappling with effective and efficient management of schools, reluctant to shed powers to elected representatives and school committees. Transfer of teachers, deployment of teachers against fake enrolments, non-accountability of school systems to local people, continue to be in the mystified domain of powerful bureaucracies. Decentralization is paid lip-service when it comes to shedding powers over teachers and schools. Transparency is shunned and corruption reigns supreme in many states in matters like teacher appointment and deployment. Teachers continue to dodge processes of local accountability and *sarpanches* manage to keep communities away from exercising greater control over schools.

Parent teacher associations and elected school education committees have stepped in to demand improved schools, but their voice is often drowned in the fathomless educational bureaucracy. Teacher development and establishment of institutions of excellence

to support this process at cluster, block, district and state levels is still weak in many states. These institutions are often seen as a dumping ground for those unwanted as education administrators or preferred options for those teachers not wanting to teach in remote locations.

Will we ever achieve the goals of SSA if we do not focus on the reform and decentralization agenda, school autonomy and institutional development thrust? The answer is an emphatic no. But then, this is what the framework of SSA expects states to initiate and adopt. The challenge of SSA is to change the mindset of education bureaucracies and teachers, to make them responsible for meeting the learning needs of all children after providing the resources at their command to do so. The challenge is to create basic minimum learning conditions for all children in all schools/learning centres/all habitations.

The apathy of the state reflects in the slow pace of effective decentralization and community control for local level accountability of the school system. With the proliferation of private, unaided schools and the parental preference for such schools, government funded schools today are catering largely to the poor. Any significant improvement in their performance, therefore, will have positive consequences for poverty reduction. The withdrawal of children of the elite from government schools has also led to their decline as those charged with maintaining government schools do not suffer if the school functions irregularly or ineffectively.

Given the political clout of the teaching community in many states, efforts at making them locally accountable are fiercely resisted, often with success. The choice before the political and bureaucratic elite today is

whether to side with an unaccountable school system or to ensure that poor children get quality education through well-endowed and effectively managed government schools. The Kendriya Vidyalayas, the Navodaya Vidyalayas, the specially endowed schools in some states, are examples suggesting that government funded schools can also be properly endowed and well run.

The starting point for SSA has been an intensive habitation based household survey to ascertain where the under 14 children are. These household survey forms, stitched together, are expected to form the Education Register, to be available in the local school. This register, prepared in collaboration with local communities, has to be updated annually to record the progress of children in the school system. Community owned school registers are already being maintained in Madhya Pradesh with effective outcomes under the supervision of the Rajiv Gandhi Mission.

Habitation planning is a reality in Andhra Pradesh. Periodic household surveys are the norm under Rajasthan's *Shiksha Aapke Dwaar* programme. Many chief ministers have expressed a strong political will to honour the right to education through community contact programmes, special interventions and over all support for universal elementary education. The constitutional amendment making elementary education a fundamental right and the comprehensive SSA programme is an opportunity for states to move towards honouring the right to elementary education. It is not simply a resource issue; it is equally important a reform issue as well, as no amount of resources will be a substitute to a fundamental change in the mindsets of those who currently control and manage the school systems.

There surely are many signs of hope. Involvement of elected representatives of panchayats and parents of children in schools has increased in most states. The Supreme Court's intervention for hot cooked meals in schools had an impact with more states complying with its instructions. There are more resources available at school level to meet the contingent needs of teaching/learning materials, school repairs and maintenance, and petty grants. New textbooks are available to most students, generally on time. School facilities have improved with the thrust on VEC led school construction efforts.

Government and local body schools look more attractive these days on account of school maintenance support and large scale, low cost teaching materials that have been developed, though not adequately used, in many schools through teacher and school grants. Teacher development programmes have increased and in many states, block and cluster resource centres are functioning effectively for teacher support. Household and school surveys have generated enthusiasm in teaching the out of school children. A diversity of interventions like residential and non-residential bridge courses for 9-14 age children have made it possible to provide for age specific mainstreaming of older children who are out of school. Education guarantee schools and other forms of alternate schooling in unserved habitations has led to an access revolution of sorts, however ill-equipped and under-funded the initiative may be.

Large scale recruitment of locally selected but generally Higher Secondary pass teachers, at lower than pay scale, has become a reality even in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, even though teacher vacancies continue to be staggering in some of the

educationally backward states. While there can be no alternative to a well paid and well trained teacher in the long run, the short run evidence indicates that low emoluments are not coming in the way of teacher effectiveness. SSA norms of a teacher for a group of 40 children, primary schools where numbers justify their conversion from alternative forms, upper primary schools as per need, possible interventions for disabled children, preparation of ten year perspective district elementary education plans reflecting the uncovered gaps in universalization, are sending strong messages of the right to elementary education.

Surely, we live in times of change, times of demand for quality elementary education from the poorest households. While SSA is a minimalist programme for guaranteeing basic learning conditions, nothing prevents the central government and states from adding onto the framework in the context of special needs. Even when the bulk of expenditure under SSA is for improving the formal school, a lot of the criticism is about promoting alternative under-funded learning centres. There are instances where SSA funds are actually being used to strengthen the alternative learning centre and develop it into a well-endowed formal school.

The sobering thought is that on both reform and resource, we need to move much faster. The government's own assessment of resources in the financial memorandum to Parliament for the constitutional amendment bill to make elementary education a fundamental right was Rs 98,000 crore over ten years. Even this commitment is not being honoured in the annual allocations, significant increases notwithstanding, and is a serious cause of concern as the Parliament had

approved the amendment, including the financial memorandum.

All arguments of fiscal constraints vanish into thin air as ultimately it is a matter of priority, a question of whether elementary education of poor children really matters. Given that it is mostly poor children who throng government/local body schools, any effort at their improvement is directly pro-poor. For a nation striving for global eminence, eight years of quality schooling for all is the minimum requirement for sustainably enhancing human capital and banishing poverty.

Resources alone, however, are only part of the solution. Equally crucial are reforms to effectively decentralize down to school level, allow for local initiatives, make communities manage the affairs of the school, encourage transparency and social audit, focus on institutional capacity development for quality and excellence, and most of all, develop an accountable public system of schooling. Effective decentralization is inconceivable without a strong emphasis on micro-planning and habitation based planning. Communities ought to have the right to plan for the educational needs of their children.

Broad norms would be acceptable but denying the community a role in planning interventions and expecting it to play a limited role in execution is not the way in which school autonomy and effective decentralization can be nurtured. Much greater investment on developing skills among teachers and community leaders for effective management of schools is required for effective decentralized management. Forms of social audit that allow full transparency in maintenance of school records will be needed if schools have to acquire autonomy in real terms. the SSA framework provides the space for

many such efforts, only if reform is at the top of the agenda of states.

The challenge of seeing all children in school, children learning and completing eight years of elementary schooling by 2010, is indeed a daunting one. It not only requires more resources, but major reforms as well. Reforms necessarily question existing power relations. If schools are to exercise more autonomy, others above in the chain must be willing to shed power. Similarly, for institutions (CRC, BRC, DIET, SCERT) to develop as centres of excellence, the selection criteria must be transparent and clear responsibilities earmarked. Large bureaucracies often cover up non-performance as the outcome orientation is weak. The challenge, therefore, is to look at changes in power relations in the school system.

The poor are demanding education. The fact that hungry, malnourished faces throng in schools, both in rural and urban areas in enrolment drives gives reason for hope. Not doing enough to keep them in schools will become ground for despair. Hope never dies in a democracy. Political democracy has taken great strides in independent India with the poor participating in large numbers, during elections at all levels. Leaders from hitherto unprivileged communities are today in positions of power. It is an opportunity for them to honour their commitment to social justice.

Remember, the children who are not in school are from poor families in rural and urban India, mostly girls and children from dalit, minority and tribal households, eking out a living as agricultural labourers, migrant labourers, construction workers, as destitute women, or as lowly paid seasonal labourers. Even they have demanded quality schooling for their children. Let democracy not fail them.

Transformation or tinkering?

AMUKTA MAHAPATRA

WITH schooling recognized as one key indicator of the human development index, a lot of money and effort has been invested in this sector in recent years. In the eighties, when educators and NGOs were interested in starting programmes with a focus on learning and education, international and other resource agencies often said that it was not their area of priority. Some others felt that socially organizing the people was enough and everything else would fall into place. At that time the 'correct' activities in development circles were health, mobilizing people or pursuing an integrated development project.

One could argue till one was blue, but education was not seen as an instrument for bringing about social change. Only a few agencies had schooling as their focus and this too possibly because of its organizational

compulsions or 'safety'. With the welcome, widening interest in school education over the past decade, it is time to examine if one is moving in the right direction.

For those working on the education system, one of the first questions relates to the objective of this intervention. Is the aim to make the system more *efficient*? Is that sufficient? To make a system that has not worked for fifty years deliver a little more—is the effort required worth it? Or do we want to *reform* one or more elements of the system? Or does the school system need to be *transformed* for true learning to take place, for it to be in consonance with its larger environment and to enable children and educators to live and generate values considered important for human society? Or should all this be done simultaneously so that the investments of

time, effort and money are worthwhile?

But inescapably, investment in education must contribute to creating a vibrant individual, a brilliant community and a sparkling state. Each unit must contribute to the other, shining not from an artificial source of light, but its own.

It is difficult to be original about educational ideas, concepts, methodology and so on. Most of it has already been said or worked on by someone or the other during the past hundred years or so. What has to be done today is to put these ideas into practice, into the schoolroom, the school system, so that the actual actors – the child and the teacher – benefit from it. And such practice needs to become an aspect of their daily life. Ideas like child centred education, participatory methods and activity-based learning have become a part of the educator's parlance thanks to the efforts of the New Education Policy (1986), DPEP, joyful learning programmes, and the efforts of many individuals, NGOs and a few schools. But for these principles not to remain mere slogans or rhetoric, in fact for these principles to work in depth, the relevant frameworks need to be aligned.

One framework that we can start with is the Constitution of India. The ideas of democracy and equality delineated in the Constitution are universally accepted. But does democracy exist in the classroom? Does it form a part of the training given to the teacher? Or is democracy just a chapter in a textbook, to be regurgitated for the exam? If children do not experience democracy how will they grow up to behave democratically as adults? Is it acceptable that these ideas be merely enshrined in the Constitution, even as we continue to be authoritarian in our training institutions and schools?

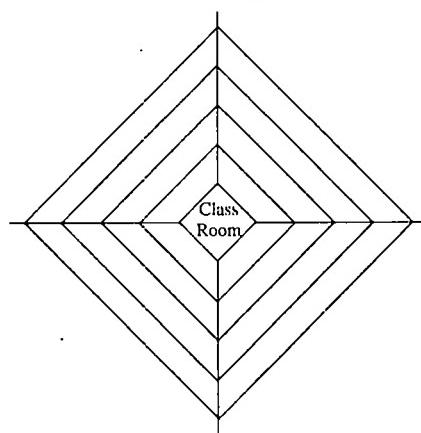
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Should we remain feudal in the workplace? If one of our aims is to make the nation functionally democratic, we have to make other frameworks correspond to it.

There are other frameworks, some broader and others more specific, that need to be considered. These need to be reflected upon before attempting to change existing systems or processes. Essential frameworks include human values – what is it that we want to pass onto the next generation? The culture base of the school community, the principles of learning, the curriculum, the learning materials, the training methodology, one's understanding of the child and so on are important frameworks that need to be aligned.

A good education system must not offer a concoction of mixed-up messages; together, the frameworks need to have a cohesive effect in the classroom and on the child. This will hold true for whichever framework we adopt. Only with such an alignment can the human, social and pedagogical principles generally accepted by the education community become part of the classroom.

What then are these essential principles that need to be made tangible in the classroom, for quality and integrated learning to occur every day. We cannot have quality education behave like the kurinji flower of the



Western Ghats which blooms once every 14 years!

The most critical element is the teacher-child relationship which forms the basis for schoolroom interaction. To enable the teacher to function in a fashion that builds a bond between the child and the teacher certain things need to be in place. The crucial factor is that the atmosphere, the method of interaction and communication in the learning environment needs to become less authoritarian and more humane. This change is urgently needed.

The relationship has to be based on affection and dignity that are the primary values of a good society, rather than fear, humiliation and misuse of power. The teachers need to be made conscious of the cause and effect of their professional behaviour in training programmes to enable them to create a relationship that is functional (and not dysfunctional) for learning to occur. And we know from studies and experience that children learn better, with greater comprehension, if the teacher shows interest and if the classroom environment is congenial.

The next critical area that needs some focus in order to make an impact upon the school system relates to the notion of the child – the developmental stages a nascent human being goes through, the perception of how a child learns and the child-society interface. This should form the cornerstone of the education edifice and everything else needs to be structurally engineered from here. After all, isn't the school meant for the child? The teacher's preparation, the textbooks-workbooks, the methodology adopted, the syllabus, the learning material, the ongoing support to the teacher by the supervisory personnel, the school building – all have to be geared to the child's needs.

We often consider the child only from the requirement of becoming a future adult. But if his present needs are not fulfilled it will be difficult for him to become a wholesome, mature adult. Each child's present, the here and now, is important and he has to learn for his life and its requirements at that moment. A child's physical as well as psychological needs have to be met at appropriate stages for him to evolve into mature adulthood.

There is sufficient documentation available on the child's developmental stages. However, since most education reports only make a cursory mention of this area and leave the rest to child specialists, let us get perceptions right to enable us to go to deeper levels of discussion and practice.

The child does not develop like a plant, merely growing from small to big, but more like the butterfly that goes through a metamorphosis at every phase. The child's needs in each area of development—the physical, the cognitive and the affective domains—change as he moves from one plane to the other. For example, the pre-primary child, upto approximately six years of age needs to work and think through his hands much more than an older child; only then does real learning occur and the personality of the child gets integrated. The child between six to twelve years (more pertinent for the Universalization of Elementary Education) is voraciously hungry to feed his intellectual capacities. This is his age of reason, making connections with all that is available in the entire universe. It is also a time for the imagination to expand and to see things holistically.

The adolescent, after the personality is grounded from birth to the six years' phase and an intellectual base is established in the six to twelve years' plane, is intrinsically creative. He also

wants a taste of the larger society that he will soon become a full member of. He wants to understand the underlying basis of human society, the links between land, modes of production, money and how mankind has developed. This he wants to learn, not through books and lectures, but through life and interaction. There is now an underlying need to search for the ideal and the perfect in human society.

The supporting points of a learning web have to be placed so that the child learner captures the essence of the world, the universe. If these concept points are narrowly spaced out or weakly constructed, the area of learning will be smaller and limit the range of comprehension available to the child. Both the horizontal expanse and the depth of knowledge will be lacking. Children's capacities are grossly underestimated through the school system and the volume and weight of the school bag is often mistaken for academic skill, conceptual clarity and rigour.

But is any of this taken into account while planning for schools? Children drop out for good reasons. The school environment does not run parallel to their natural learning processes. Indigenous communities, in touch with their children's needs, often understood this better and had evolved paths of learning and rituals to mark these and other milestones and processes.

Besides converting the teacher-learner relationship into a more healthy bonding and addressing the learning curve of the child through the progressive planes on his way to becoming an adult, what else needs to be made visible in the classroom for an effective programme?

The first feature one looks for in a classroom is whether the children are active or passive. Is there life in the

class? Are children moving and talking? Human beings have two main forms of expression—movement and speech. Imagine what would happen to a person who has these capacities but is tied up for the larger part of the day. It is even worse for the children because these are the two fundamental skills they have mastered by the time they enter school. But as soon as they go in with an expectation of learning and being with their friends, they are asked to be quiet and keep still. This is de-humanizing and is violence perpetuated on the young.

We do not protest strongly enough against this but are quick to disapprove when children, reacting to this oppression, become restless, angry, dull or listless. That is their way of protesting and letting the adults know what is happening internally. It is important that the child needs to move and speak in class as is natural to any living being, following of course the ground rules that one talks softly and walks quietly when there are so many people working together. And we know that learning happens best when there is an activity the child can do and work on with his head, heart and hand.

That the child is a constructor (not merely a placid consumer) of his own fund of knowledge is a well accepted idea. But how this can be manifested in the normal government school or even the supposedly good English medium school remains an issue. One way is for practitioners to get over the hurdle of 'herd' teaching as the only way of managing a class. There has to be a mix of individual, group and collective lessons. Just as an adult cannot be 'one of the masses' all the time and needs to be alone, work as a member of a team and at times be a part of a nation or any other collective, as schoolroom too has to offer these diverse experiences as a way of life to

the child. The child needs to be comfortable working by himself or herself, should spontaneously absorb the rules of being a member of a group and also understand what it means to be a part of the collective class or school.

During individual work time, using the learning materials for different subjects, the child needs to choose his work after an initial introduction. The choice of activity and learning during this time has to be his own, with the teacher guiding when necessary. Through this individual work, alongside some interaction with other children and group work, the child constructs his concepts that nobody else can do for him.

By the simple fact of moving and talking in class and creating and constructing his conceptual foundation through individual and group activity the child gets an opportunity to become an exploring learner. Moving the teacher from a fixed position at the head of the class to the midst of children offers the teacher an opportunity to shift from his usual stance of a 'policeman' to that of a guide and a true educator. But to enable the teacher and the taught to go beyond the merely symbolic and to bring about a pedagogical change in the classroom requires that the training programmes also fall into a broader framework.

Both the principles and practice of sound pedagogy have to be made into a continuum, a kind of a Möbius strip. These linkages need to be worked into the training methodology so as to make it participatory and professional, enabling the teachers to become partners in the process of transformation.

Currently, the teacher trainees in training institutions are treated like cadets for two years with little internal, personal preparation for evolving into an educator. Once in the field,

untrained mind of the teacher operates on the basis of old biases and prejudices collected through his own schooling and life experiences. Part of the teacher's preparation should be to examine these experiences and beliefs, analyze and reflect upon them within the precincts of the professional course. This reflection could be on anything from the theory of child behaviour to how one has to teach art skills, so that the teacher is armed with fresh perceptions, fundamental thinking skills and an understanding of functioning in a changing school culture.

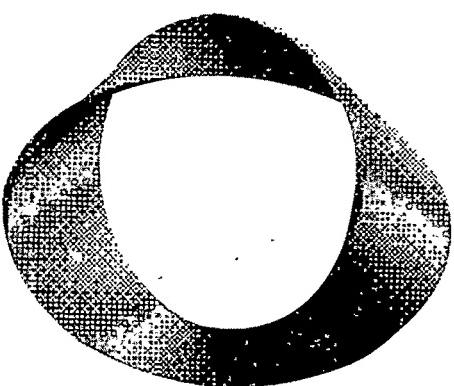
If done systematically following the psychological (rather than merely the logical) process of learning, there would be no need to go through massive in-service training workshops, organised even when a reformatted textbook is introduced for class I. A trained teacher can surely look at any textbook and teach from it? If a few teachers cannot, they can get help from their colleagues. But if all teachers across the state need to be taught how to incorporate every change introduced, then it is time to review the training system and the support structure offered to the teacher at his workstation.

What is called for is a belief in teachers, a belief in children that they can do a lot if given the space and the

environment. The same teachers in a private school deliver. The same teachers in a training context show remarkable qualities. The same children in demo schools set up during training sessions work diligently, enthusiastically and naturally. The underlying issue seems to be the use of control, power and authority. In a stifling, over-structured system the demand is to follow blindly what is handed down; the individual does not come into play in such a scenario. But if there is an opening up, a letting go by the authorities, there is a good chance the situation will change.

The planners, the managers, the supervisors of such a large system do require professional courses in management and HRD to recognize these concerns and learn styles of management more relevant for today's world to be in line with the larger frameworks adopted by the nation. If only we learn to manage these issues with greater ease and élan, we could introduce systemic changes without a fear of losing control. The autonomy offered to every unit of operations will then initiate a dynamic that could make each school and each teacher generate a more positive energy within the parameters of the state education system.

To bring in qualitative changes is difficult, especially in the field of education, which is rather amorphous and has more intangibles than most other areas. Arriving at standards and specifications for the various components and processes of the system is an important first big step. What is equally essential is a leap of the imagination. One has to imagine what is not there, what could be possible, what could be a new landscape. This image has to be held in the mind so that it can be transformed, in time, into a functioning reality.



In search of quality

SHARADA JAIN

'We have addressed the issue of (universal) access with a fair degree of success. The problem of quality remains... it is indeed a very complex problem.'¹ Why is quality seen as a 'problem'? Is it because we do not understand the exact implications of a composite concept—'quality education'? This would basically make it a conceptual issue. Or is it a case of inability to design and handle an implementing mechanism? This can be termed a functional inadequacy. The problematic character of quality education may either be attributed to obscurity at the level of understanding or to an inability to handle a strategic challenge, or both!

While the issue of quality has been worrying educational managers just as much as philosophers of education, a closer look at the above questions reveals that the problem is neither new nor unique to the educational context. It is essentially another manifestation of complexity generated by a mix of the tangible and intangible in a single concept. Similar complex concepts such as 'development', 'progress' and 'health' figure frequently in development discourse. They too present the tangible-intangible complexity very similar to that in education.

All these concepts derive their meaning from a core qualitative component. As supportive features, some tangible components also get fused

in the totality. However, given the emphasis on visibility and measurability, it is the scaffolding dimension which is seen as the dominant feature of the concept, almost creating a synonymy with the totality of the concept.

Evaluation, like 'access' in education, captures the visible and measurable and that sets the agenda for what functionaries feel comfortable with, while the intangible, though constituting the core of the conception, acquires a problematic character.

Historically, this complexity has been addressed by many thinkers. Their deliberations can broadly be captured in two sets of approaches—the management and the analytic. These two frameworks effectively represent two ends of the spectrum. Analytic philosophers perceive the challenge at the conceptual level and focus on clearing the logical geography around the terms that figure in the discourse. They shift the inquiry to a more basic concept of 'good', and dig at its roots and manifestations to arrive at an understanding of related concepts like 'excellence', 'quality' and 'improvement'.

At the other end is the management approach which finds the second set of questions as basic or worth addressing. This group deals with working out a systematic strategy to capture and control the elusive character of quality. 'If we want quality output, we must know what it entails

1. District Education Officer, Rajasthan.

and what it looks like.' Deliberations around the above two frameworks have displayed a great deal of diversity, but their verdict with respect to the problematic nature of quality has been fairly clear and in harmony.

Beginning with the latest and most familiar management approach – simplified to its basics – the first step is to dissolve all complexity at the conceptual level. Begin with a clear definition: 'Quality is that which meets the requirement.' Focus, therefore on identifying, listing, arranging and understanding the requirements. Two propositions follow from this axiom. First, if the requirements can be delineated with clarity then they can be met satisfactorily. Second, the more detailed the specification, the greater is the possibility of optimising quality. A rider is that all this deliberation/ action is, of course, to be conducted in a realistic framework that is clear about the constraints which need to be specifically dealt with.

From the two basic propositions listed above follows the notion of quality control which essentially is a technique of monitoring. The steps involved are fairly straight-forward. Break the intangible concept into small observable, measurable tasks which can be planned, budgeted, checklist, implemented and monitored systematically.

Take a simple example. If one is looking for a quality cup of tea, the first step should be to specify the requirement – Chinese tea? Darjeeling tea? masala tea? ... and so on. Next, break the operation in small steps, each measurable, e.g. procure clean water, ensure boiling point, ensure required tea leaves, follow instructions to the detail... milk? sugar? Equal? The expectation is that after all these details are taken care of, the tea would be to satisfaction. And if

we still have customers who say, 'Well! something is missing, it is not like the tea my mother makes,' just remember to overlook with a smile.

Offering an analogy as argument is rarely considered acceptable in a long debate, but the above illustration provides a simple way to explain the approach which addresses quality in a framework which treats measurability as a principle key to control. Quality is not something which is a matter of intimate experience or individual perception. It can be obtained with a clear principle guiding the process – discipline of the detail.

This basic technique of breaking a complex whole into small, simple and manageable parts and converting them into doable tasks has produced outstanding results in commodity production. Wherever sameness, predictability and scale are prime concerns, this approach works. It is not only in automobile manufacture or branded consumer items but also in hotel management and cooking recipes that one finds an operational vision of the range of activities that follow this strategy.

But areas where our preoccupation is not with products but processes, where we are not looking for repetitive sameness but an exploration of new possibilities where the unusual, creative, exclusive is a value, is it possible to follow the same strategy? Does the educational agenda fall in the former or the latter frame? Or both?

Some leading education activists strongly argue that there is much in education which needs to be tackled in the framework designed by quality managers. We have to evolve techniques which can handle the learning needs of large numbers. And these techniques have to be detailed and monitored effectively in order to give results.

An outstanding success story can be seen in the Pratham Read India programme. They have firmly and squarely adopted a limited agenda and chalked out systematic steps to give results. Can a similar strategy be followed in basic mathematics? The outcomes have yet to be evaluated but the acknowledgement of a possible approach cannot be denied. The questions that remain are: Does learning to read make a person a 'learner'? Can the issue of quality in education be handled by merely extending this approach or does it need making many more choices besides this basic ground preparation?

Before deriving final conclusions, let us examine what the philosophers have to say in this context. Their starting point is an examination of the concept of 'good'. The approach is to take the issue as it is identified in common language and analyse its intent. For the common person, the issue is to ensure the qualitative dimension by giving it the label 'good'.

This, in simple terms, means 'to-satisfaction' or what has 'high quality'. This adjective 'good' is used in various contexts – good food, good friend, good house, good employee... good education also falls in this series. Analysing the range where this term is used in a meaningful way, all that emerges is that good is a unique adjective which does not denote anything by itself in terms of content. It gets qualified by the noun it relates to. It would be the concept of a friend which would give meaning to the term good-friend. The concept of house would give meaning to our usage of good-house. And our concept of food would tell us whether a specific serving can be labeled good food. Hence, by itself good only stands for meeting the standard set by the noun it qualifies. Following this line of argument, the

concept of education would define what good education is.

But what is 'education'? And here the complexity deepens. There are two possible routes to understanding education as a concept. It can either be understood by its current usage or by what people feel it 'ought to be'. Both these approaches reveal a good deal of diversity and unresolved differences.

The 'usage' route reveals that 'education', linguistically, is an inflated word. It encompasses a range of meanings, stretching from anything that happens to 'enhance the wisdom' of a person, to only the formalised training which is received in an institution. We find a purely descriptive, value-neutral usage in statements like 'funds have to be allocated for primary education' just as often we have heavy, value-loaded usage as in 'nothing can succeed (democracy) unless people are educated', or 'education is the answer to health problems.' There is seldom a conscious spelling out of the links between 'education', 'information', 'knowledge' and 'wisdom' though some implicit relationship or overlap is often assumed. If education is seen as an instrumental value for equipping a person for a 'better life' then our confusion about what constitutes a better life reflects upon the preliminary discourse on educational issues in a significant manner.

What education 'ought' to be doing has possibly elicited an even greater range of diversity. Policy in India ostensibly declares investments in education as a means for a larger goal, i.e., 'good of the people' – more specifically the marginalised groups.² In contrast to government policy, which envisages education as the means of empowerment of deprived groups, i.e. primarily as a social good, the lay person perceives education as

something which ought to give power at an individual level. Most parents feel that education, by providing access to the mainstream service system, ought to enhance upward social and economic mobility. The need to receive education for most people rests on the possible capacity to secure a job or earn a 'good living'.

For many development interventionists, education is a means of upgrading the productivity of the people and a necessary component of economic improvement. They resist the tall claims of the educationist for changing attitudes, preferring more modest terms like 'extension' and 'training' to education. It is the acquisition of 'skills' which is expected to bring about a change in the lives of people. This understanding of the role of education is generally woven into all development schemes.

What, then, can inform policy as well as people about the core 'intent' of education around which quality issues can be made more comprehensible? This issue becomes crucial in view of the fact that educational discourse has finally been placed in the framework of Rights. Not only should the planners have a clear logic for the choices that are made in educational management, but these choices have to be articulated in a manner which are lucid enough so that people understand and support them.

Given the above backdrop, we may have to start afresh and approach the question of quality education, working backwards, from a basic con-

2. The National Policy for Education 1986 stated that 'The national education system will play a positive, interventionist role... It will foster the development of new values through re-designed curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering.'

sensus on who we can call an educated person. This seems to be a less trodden path and therefore simpler.

Two distinct features surface here – one, which gives it a cognitive dimension and the other which is derived from what 'rights' are all about. First, the educated person despite belonging to diverse contexts must be able to move with growing ease in the world of knowledge.

With the information explosion and fast changing texture of society, the expectation from education has shifted from creating a well-informed person to one who has the basic tools and skills for accessing and absorbing a growing body of knowledge. This is the cognitive dimension of education. It is self-evident that a person who is incompetent to access knowledge at any basic level is not educated. This also eliminates rote-learning from educational expectations.

Second, it is also clear that a truly educated person should have the discretion and habit of using the knowledge within a framework of justice. This is the value dimension of education. The legitimacy for accepting this as a core assumption rests on the understanding that education is stationed within the framework of rights, which acquires legitimacy from a larger framework of justice. If educational processes are not promoting and strengthening a just social order, then education should not be placed as a fundamental right.

If the above position is rationally justifiable, the notion of quality education becomes clearer. Quality education is a process of initiating and strengthening the two strands of cognitive enterprise within a framework of justice. This process needs to be carried on steadily and harmoniously in school, at home, at work, and throughout the life situation.

In the labyrinth of the education bureaucracy

A. R. VASAVI

IN matters related to elementary education, more than in any other field, the Indian state's metacapital is unquestionable. That is, the state not only has access to real capital but also deploys and reinforces its power through the symbolic, cultural and social capital that it has built up. In this the state not only permits the functioning of elementary education institutions, but is also its most dominant owner and manages and supervises the multiple functions associated with it: it selects teachers and administrators, designs curricula and syllabi, constitutes textbook committees, produces and distributes the texts, sets the school schedule including exams, regulates teachers and their awards, punishments and transfers, and executes a range of programmes and schemes. To perform all these and more, the state's apparatus is not merely large and bureaucratic but a

labyrinth reflecting the larger culture from which its personnel are drawn, in turn reproducing a culture that makes the adequate functioning of its agents problematic.

The plethora of education related institutions from the block level to the state (the secretariat, Commissioner's office, textbook division, midday meal division, Council for Education Research and Training, District Institute for Education and Training, Deputy Director of Instruction's office, Block Education offices and the offices for new programmes such as DPEP and now the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) are all part of this labyrinth and the personnel participate and strategise in ways that are particular and peculiar to it.

Although central to the functioning of the education system, this bureaucracy has largely remained unstudied and the ways in which it

thwarts, distorts and even destroys programmes and policies to address education related problems have been overlooked. Understanding its culture and impact on the education system, may highlight the key reasons why even well-thought out and designed programmes peter out to have no impact and why despite nearly a decade of programmes to improve elementary education we see minimal results on the ground.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of this labyrinth is the extent to which it is devoid of a culture of democracy and professionalism. While this may be applicable to all state departments that function as bureaucracies, the marking of some of the institutions such as the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) and the Department for State Education Research and Training (DSERT), which are responsible for the continued training of teachers and the upgradation of academic quality/ production of texts respectively by this culture, is cause for concern. The impact of such a non-democratic culture is that it is both directly and vicariously carried to the most basic unit of the system—the school.

Most decisions and planning are carried out at higher levels and are transmitted as orders to lower levels (from central government agencies to state agencies and from there to district and block levels), without the contribution and inputs of various sections and levels. This vertical production and transfer of decisions and programmes is replicated at every level with concomitant loss of meaning and orientation. Little wonder that decisions and hence programmes and policies are seen and internalized as just another set of orders in relation to which they, as education administrators, have nothing at stake.

As most agents are enveloped in a condition of ataraxia, of ‘not being troubled’,¹ they become indifferent to programmes and work. Such a condition helps explain why bureaucrats at different levels are insufficiently engaged with programmes, and why so many remain callous and disinterested in their work and the execution of programmes.

The non-democratic culture also fosters a culture of overt submission and covert sabotage. Enveloped in a culture of ‘sir’ and ‘madam’ in which status and hierarchy consciousness is deep and visible, many agents ensure that their own position vis-à-vis higher ups is not jeopardized. Adding to this is a patrimonial structure and orientation which inculcates among its members a culture of supplication and servitude. Gifts, services and favours flow from the lower rungs to those in positions of power and decision making in an attempt to gain their recognition. The jostling for position alone accounts for the deep factionalism among members of the department.

Camps and dissent form around and between those favoured and disfavoured by the head and most activities become subject to scrutiny, not for their content and orientation but as to the source of decisions. On the one hand, authority (even undemocratic authority) is never directly questioned. On the other, authority, especially if represented by an unpopular person, is contested and challenged through vicarious and indirect ways. In such contexts, unpopular heads are challenged not directly but through ensuring that work and its quality suffer. Far from delinking work from the persona of the head, the two are intermingled to be jointly resisted and thwarted.

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, Routledge, London, 1998.

As a result, the link between work and the agent is contradictory: at one level what requires personal commitment and dedication is met with indifference and carelessness; obversely, what must be undertaken in an impartial and impersonal way is subject to personal readings and interpretations and is sabotaged. Under such conditions, how can an education department with a mandate requiring its personnel to be proactive, creative and independent in executing programmes be realized? No wonder that programmes which hinge on the participation and contribution of personnel, such as that of teaching and conducting the Diploma in Education (pre-service teacher training) and the continuous in-service teacher training, do not have inputs that are updated, relevant and interesting.

As a result of this non-democratic culture and the ataraxia that afflicts them, most members succumb to a condition of routinisation. Far from being creative, most programmes become subject to a process where agents receive a particular package designed elsewhere by higher authorities which they replicate, often in a watered down and distorted version. Such routinisation constitutes the work culture norm within these departments and is associated with a mindless performance of tasks without an ability or interest to assess work in terms of quality, relevance and impact. Perhaps the most visible impact of this process of routinisation is a lack of sensitivity and engagement that foredooms many programmes to failure.

Programmes that particularly require deep involvement and commitment from members of the department are victims of such attitudes. New programmes or schemes that call for decentralized and context

specific measures also meet a similar fate. This largely explains why the DPEP, designed to be a decentralized, district specific programme, largely failed to address local and district specific problems.

Expecting education personnel to know the details of how many children are out of school and why, allowing for local holidays, or integrating local knowledge etc. are all issues which go beyond the orientation of teachers and administrators to cater to local needs. An inability to do so is manifested in even the data that is supposed to be gathered. For example, the mandate is to have regular data on schools and the various programmes. In practice, data sheets are filled without a responsibility for veracity and collated without verification and cross-checking such that the end result is often contradictory data that is also outdated by the time it is printed! Such examples abound: instructions to identify school dropouts have seen half-hearted effort and data remains questionable; programmes to re-enrol and support out of school children see less than a quarter of eligible children in school; instructions to supervise teachers and academic inputs are rarely carried out.

More than the thwarting of programmes, the agents themselves become 'unconscious' victims of routinisation. Their inadequate skills and training go unnoticed and they seek no measures or inputs to improve. No surprise that programmes to 'professionalise' or upgrade the knowledge and skills of department members have rarely met with any success. A singular but persistent problem with such a state of routinisation is the extent to which the bureaucrats seek to lay blame on the system rather than be reflexive about the possibilities of providing their own suggestions for

improvement or of their own inadequate skills to meet the demands of work. Constantly reiterating administrative demands over academic responsibilities is one way in which work is either stalled or unperformed. This was emphatically brought home to us when members of a district education bureaucracy in Karnataka were asked to write a 'vision statement' of their work and responsibilities. After much thought the respondents' visions turned out to be one of getting facilities such as a television, telephone and so on for their work!

The undemocratic and ataraxic culture of the bureaucracy both draws upon and reproduces the larger culture from which the agents and members are drawn. Few instances are more explicit about this than the entrenched caste bias among members of the education department. While the ability and capacity of children from low-ranked caste and tribes is always suspect, the new government programmes that enforce the provision of special aid to them have led many to mark these children as the 'government's children' and to treat them with contempt and insensitivity. In addition, such a culture which reifies and reproduces hierarchy and status makes the undemocratic culture within the bureaucracy legitimate and acceptable. Further, the actors and agents play out their internalized norms of inclusion and exclusion, forming groups in terms of gender, caste, community and religious differences, and reproducing stereotypical notions of each other.

Marked by these characteristics, education bureaucrats are often in a double bind. At one level there exists an undemocratic culture that constitutes the 'administrative rationality',²

which leads to the loss of agency and toataraxia. At another level, the socially derived biases and orientation reinforce their isolation and lack of reflexivity. A result is that bureaucrats have become like school students playing truant, defying the rules that bind them in ways that only further disadvantage them. Such actions and attitudes include the failure to update themselves on new ideas and practices, an indifference to new programmes and a closure to innovation and creativity. In many ways, this closure is part of a self-preservation strategy which seems to be the only option in the context of the lack of a larger democratic ethos.

Given such conditions and characteristics of the education bureaucracy, it is pertinent that we understand why the plethora of programmes that have been continually developed and deployed, especially since the mid-1990s and the advent of the World Bank's DPEP, and the financial backing they received, have not been that successful. Placing these programmes within the context of the functioning of the education bureaucracy itself may tell us more about the need to reform the bureaucracy before fresh tasks of implementing new and innovative programmes are assigned to them.

Bombarding the education bureaucracy with programmes and schemes to address problems of education has been self-defeating. Until the bureaucracy itself is reoriented to its functions and responsibilities, it will largely be unable and unwilling to implement the programmes and schemes in their spirit and intent. A bureaucracy that is out of sync with the ideas it must disseminate and engage with will only make null and void the purpose and impact of new programmes.

2. Anna Yateman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats and Femocrats*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1990.

Beyond resources

DHIR JHINGRAN

ACHIEVING universal elementary education is not merely a function of availability of additional resources or even an expansion of the school infrastructure. These are necessary but insufficient conditions for making universal elementary education a reality.

After the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the debate on the Right to Education has focused, I believe erroneously, on the inadequate budgetary allocations available for this scheme. Such a lopsided debate detracts from the major issues that need to be addressed for a sustained and

result oriented effort for providing quality elementary education. Under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), which was the biggest initiative in primary education, spending had been much lower than the allocations in the annual work plans each year for the past 7-8 years. This clearly shows that serious issues relating to policy, planning and implementation are constraining the UEE (Universalization of Elementary Education) effort.

It is also a matter of grave concern that during 2003, almost every state seemed to be in a big hurry to

demonstrate that it had virtually eliminated the 'menace' of 'out of school' children. The claim of certain states, viz., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, of such drastic reduction in the number of out of school children is blatantly incorrect. The sad part is that the states are themselves undermining their efforts of achieving UEE and trivializing the daunting task of ensuring regular participation of all children in schooling. Apart from fudging of figures, mere entry of the names of children in the school admission registers is being treated as 'children attending school'. The problems of irregularly attending children, those who have dropped out, elder children, especially girls in the 10+ age group has been glossed over in the hurry to be first past the post of 'near universal' enrolment.

Since the state governments have the major responsibility for providing education and, therefore, securing the right to quality basic education, I would confine my analysis to the functioning of government programmes. For this purpose, I mainly draw upon my experience of several years of working with DPEP and SSA and the mainstream education department in the Government of Assam.

The context of elementary education in Assam is similar to that of several other educationally backward states like Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, parts of the Northeast and disadvantaged pockets in the economically or educationally better off states.

Educational planning in Assam has been very weak and the provision of school infrastructure, location of new schools, school buildings and additional teachers was not based on actual need. Teacher recruitment, placement and transfers have also been guided by political considerations. Thus, there are serious disparities in

school facilities and the quality of schooling in areas which are remote or inhabited by marginalized groups like tea garden workers, santhalis, certain other tribal groups and the Muslim pockets in riverine areas is very unsatisfactory. These are also the areas and social groups among whom the commitment to education is weak and which have the highest proportion of out of school children.

Thus, the areas where the highest number of children need to be brought into and retained in schools, have schools with the poorest provisioning. Reserve forest areas and flood affected riverine islands have their own peculiar problems that make the task of UEE more difficult. There is not enough political commitment to a progressive agenda for education. The panchayat system has only recently been established. In many areas, schools do not function regularly and the learning levels of students are low.

It is in this context that the work for UEE had been undertaken in Assam. This paper will only highlight a small part of the work with a limited objective of drawing out the major issues and opportunities in reforming elementary education.

I present here four aspects of our work that are crucial to any government effort to provide quality basic education to *all* children, especially in the context outlined above: evidence and norm-based planning and implementation; ensuring basic learning conditions in all schools; strong commitment to equity that is reflected in policies, fund allocation and implementation; and decentralization of decision-making and accountability at all levels, including schools.

The absence of any evidence-based planning in the mainstream education system meant that there were serious disparities in education provisioning.

For long, the principle of allocation of resources had been an equal distribution of funds to each block or legislative assembly constituency, irrespective of real needs. This 'equality' in fund allocation had heightened the existing inequalities.

A participatory mapping and microplanning exercise that included village mapping, group discussion, house-to-house surveys and school surveys was conducted in early 2002. This was followed by a technical survey of school space and building conditions. During visits of cluster and block level academic personnel, school-wise records of students' attendance and achievement levels (in quarterly tests) were generated.

The analysed databases were used extensively for sensitizing the education bureaucracy and political executive by highlighting the disparities across social groups and geographical areas in school facilities, enrolment rates, teacher availability, linguistic diversity and the disadvantages for some groups of children, incidence of migration, and so on. This set the tone for making *equity* the central focus of the UEE programme.

A four step process followed:

- i) All the databases were made public through newspapers and small booklets distributed to schools, villages and panchayats.
- ii) Clear criteria or norms were defined for several interventions, e.g. when does a school become eligible for a bridge course? Which habitation qualifies for a community school? Which school is eligible for a para teacher?
- iii) These norms were given wide publicity by printing leaflets, discussion in meetings at village, panchayat and block levels.
- iv) Databases were regularly updated at village, school, block and district levels. Thus, the information was not

'one time' but dynamic in nature. The Village Education Registers became the basis for planning at the village level.

The well publicized norms and databases were used for several interventions including selection of schools for repair and construction, identification of schools that qualified for additional teachers, gradation of schools for providing additional academic support, identification of disadvantaged areas that would be eligible for special compensatory packages, and so on. School and village education committees also made demands for bridge courses and 'remedial support' teachers based on these public databases.

Apart from ensuring better targeting of interventions and funds, this strategy had three other benefits. First, the transparency in decision-making and adherence to norms created a trust or faith in the UEE programme among people – teachers, parents, panchayat representatives and even educational administrators – who were totally disillusioned with the functioning of the education system.

Second, it helped to create entitlements or rights to certain benefits which were brought into the public domain. Thus a village with 20 non-school going children in the age group 7-9 years knew that it was entitled for a short term bridge course centre and could start planning for it as soon as the guidelines were issued. Similarly, schools with a paucity of teachers knew their deficit which had been published (school-wise) in all local newspapers. They also knew which

1. We did not use the usual criterion of number of rooms available in a school because they are often not in good shape and overcrowded. The most appropriate criterion therefore is the *usable* (good condition) space available per child, which should ideally be eight square feet. In the next stage, the target is to increase the space per child to 10 sq. feet.

schools had surplus teachers and would have to surrender them or at least not be eligible for any additional teachers.

Third, a clarity in the norms meant that decision-making could be decentralized to the district and block levels. In government, the basic problem is that lower levels are never trusted with decision-making that has financial implications. Here, since the criteria were so clear, block level teams headed by the block education officer could take the final decision on several interventions. This strategy completely overturned the traditional system of allocating equal funds and facilities to all blocks within a district.

While under DPEP a lot of work was undertaken for pedagogical re-

newal of teaching-learning practices, it had not been possible to address the problems of disparity in the 'basic learning conditions' in schools which we defined as essential prerequisites (necessary, but not sufficient) for learning to take place. We identified the following minimum requirements for a school in Assam:

- i) Adequate number of teachers (as per norm, i.e. a minimum of two teachers and additional teachers for every 40 students).
- ii) A minimum usable space per child (based on usable plinth area and 'real enrolment').
- iii) Textbooks for all children (which are distributed free of cost).
- iv) Drinking water and toilets.
- v) A small school library with at least 100 books meant for children at the primary level.

Norm based prioritization of civil works

All the 40,000 primary and upper primary schools were surveyed by technical personnel to record the conditions of the building in great detail and also the usable space available for teaching-learning. Each school was photographed and the entire database digitized. These school records have been regularly updated to reflect any change in the building conditions or available space.

Based on the condition of the school building and usable space for the child,¹ every school was listed under 12 different categories, indicating a sequential need-based prioritization for repairs or additional classroom construction.

These categorized and prioritized schools lists were then published and widely circulated. Objections were invited to the prioritization and people could consult the detailed school wise records and photographs at the block education office. The schools were selected for construction grants based on their priority in these lists. Thus, allocation of funds was made on a school wise basis which again resulted in preferential allocation of funds to areas that had hitherto been neglected.

Since this process also took away the discretion and nepotism that was being practiced by the legislators in allocating school construction grants, it was vehemently opposed. To assuage their hurt egos, we allowed a district level committee that included MLAs to select schools from within a category, but they were not allowed to move to a lower priority category till all schools in the higher priority category had been selected for construction grants. Later, this policy became the rallying point for justifying a demand for my ouster from the Assam UEE Mission.

- vi) A minimum set of identified TLMs (teaching-learning aids).
- vii) Exercise books and pencils, pens, erasers for every child.
- viii) A hot, cooked mid day meal.
- ix) Minimum instructional time in terms of teaching hours and prescribed school days.

Information on the number of teachers, building conditions and space available per child and the availability of drinking water and toilets was readily available and regularly updated. But the information on the number of appropriate library books and TLMs was not accurate. We decided to work on the minimum requirements of a library and TLM during the year by documenting the gap through regular visits of cluster and block academic personnel and include the requirements in a school-based plan that could be supported through the annual teacher and school grants under SSA. Regarding exercise books and writing materials, we could not finalise a mechanism of funding and appropriate targeting of children.

The cooked, noon-meal scheme had not taken off in Assam and, therefore, we could not operationalise it as an essential condition. A series of initiatives were taken to maximize the instructional time in schools. This could not be monitored on a school wise basis to include it as a minimum operational standard. The initiatives are listed in the section on accountability. However, our team was clear that all the nine conditions be retained as the *ideal* minimum conditions for a primary school.

We were pleasantly surprised to learn that the Fundescola² programme in Brazil has adopted a similar approach of defining and ensuring minimum operational standards of schools. We wanted to take up operationalisation of minimum standards of only

three items that could be easily measured and achieved in a years time: (a) adequate teachers, (b) usable space per child, and (c) drinking water and toilets.

For drinking water and toilets a separate action plan was drawn up by converging funds available under SSA, swajaldhara scheme, public health engineering department and Unicef. This ensured that every primary school would have adequate drinking water and toilet facilities by the end of 2004.

Based on the latest figures of enrolment and children actually found attending school and the teachers actually in position, a list of requirements of additional teachers was drawn up for schools that had a deficit. The schools with surplus teachers were also identified. The lists were printed and published widely, but the rationalization (redeployment) process of shifting the surplus teachers did not make much headway. Community teachers (with the same qualifications regular teachers) were then recruited for these schools by the school managing committees and panchayats. Also, transfers from any school that had a deficit of teachers to any school with a surplus was disallowed.

Similarly, for school buildings, a transparent process of selection of schools was followed to ensure every school had at least seven square feet

2. The Ministry of Education in Brazil is implementing a big school improvement plan (Fundescola) partly financed by the World Bank that aims primarily at overcoming the constraints of (a) inadequate school quality and (b) ineffective schooling. This is a school based development approach with several dimensions of work – one of them being ensuring that ‘minimum operational standards’ are achieved and maintained in every school. For this purpose, funds are transferred to individual school as per their costed need to meet these standards.

space per child in the first phase. This target is likely to be completed by March 2004.

To summarise, the following steps were followed: (i) define the minimum standard for teachers (number) and the space available per child; (ii) analyse available, verified data to identify schools that fell short of these minimum conditions; (iii) ensure that construction grants and additional teachers (regular or community contractual) were provided to these schools on a priority basis; and (iv) keep a constant check to ensure that all schools continue to remain at the minimum levels defined for the above two conditions. Thus, monitoring is to be done on a regularly basis.

Since the poorly provided schools were mostly located in remote, disadvantaged areas, often inhabited by tribal or other marginalized groups, this strategy contributed immensely to our thrust on equity.

The reason for discussing this strategy in detail is to highlight that appropriate and need based targeting of resources is still not a reality in most states. Most programme in-charges in the states feel that such decisions are often taken by public (political) representatives and it is difficult to implement objective, criteria based policies in such matters. Without these learning (prerequisite) conditions, it is inappropriate to talk about better teaching-learning processes and increased learning achievement levels in educationally disadvantaged areas.

Fortunately, education programmes (mainly DPEP) in Assam had developed a sensitivity towards the basic inequities in school quality and the socio-economic background of children. The evidence and norm based decision-making process for selection of schools and villages for construction grants, setting up of bridge courses

and placement of additional teachers had an inbuilt equity orientation.

Our commitment to work preferentially for the disadvantaged took us on a collision course with the tea industry which was partly responsible for the sorry state of primary education within the tea estates.³ Through tortuous negotiations over a year and threat of legal action, an agreement was arrived at with the tea garden managements to ensure that all facilities as per norms would be provided in tea garden schools through SSA funds. Also, all quality improvement initiatives including teacher training, cluster and school based academic guidance, regular evaluation, free textbooks and so on would be extended to these schools.

Special initiatives were also implemented for *char* (riverine islands/banks mostly inhabited by the Muslim community) and interior forest areas. SSA Assam also identified deprived urban children like rag pickers, domestic servants and children employed in shops, hotels and garages, children of construction and quarry workers, contractual agricultural child labour and children affected by insurgency/ethnic conflict as priority groups for inclusion in formal schooling or alternative strategies.

In the past two years the entire approach for affirmative action in favour of underprivileged areas and groups was formalized and a flexible menu of interventions was developed to choose from for designing 'compensatory packages' for specific situations and social groups. Three types of disadvantaged areas and social groups were identified and formally notified. These included remote and inaccessible areas, tea gardens, and

3. The tea garden management would take responsibility for ensuring universal enrolment and continuation in school.

educationally backward villages and panchayats with at least 35% children not attending school. These areas were identified based on the available data and fine-tuned in consultation with block and district teams.

Some of the special privileges for such areas were: (i) flexible norms for setting up of bridge courses or community schools (e.g. a village in any of the above areas would qualify for a centre even if there were only 15 out of school children as against the usual requirement of 25 children); (ii) engagement of local community resource persons or motivators for mobilization activities and specific drives; (iii) a special scheme for assistance to NGOs willing to work in such areas for mobilization and school improvement; (iv) a major portion of the Innovation Fund interventions under SSA was earmarked for these disadvantaged areas. A total amount of Rs 50 lakh is allowed to be spent for each district annually for innovative activities; and (v) ensuring intensive monitoring and supervision through regular and mandatory visits of programme and education department personnel to such areas.

In some areas of 'deep poverty', with difficult livelihood situations and low parental commitment for schooling, more holistic interventions including formation of women's self-help groups, literacy, health and micro-credit have been planned as small sub projects. Special programmes for supporting second language (which is the medium of instruction) acquisition through bridging strategies using primers, workbooks and teachers sensitization have been initiated in tea garden, tribal and some Nepali speaking areas.

Decentralisation was pursued in two separate dimensions. First, certain powers were vested in school commit-

tees, village education committees and panchayats for specific activities under SSA. These included the power to select teachers for community schools, bridge courses or contact teachers in formal schools. Funds for school improvement, running of bridge courses and alternative schools were also transferred to these people's committees. In almost all activities the gram panchayat was given a special role. It was heartening to see the initiative taken by a large number of gram panchayats in implementing enrolment drives, bridge courses, organizing summer camps, and so on.

Second, significant administrative decentralization was introduced in the implementation of the UEE programme including financial delegation and powers of taking decision. Thus, the district and block education officers were given responsibilities to approve location of schools, bridge courses, selection of schools for constructions, preparing proposals for disadvantaged areas etc. This was possible because the norms and criteria for various activities were well defined and there was considerable transparency in the whole system. One result of such delegation is that the lower education bureaucracy has become responsible, with a feeling of self-worth absent so far, since the education department functions in a completely top-down, instruction-based approach where most approvals are centralized at the state level.

The unfortunate part of the effort was that the entire thrust on decentralization remained programme-driven and we could only decentralize activities which were a part of the UEE mission. The state government did not transfer any powers to the panchayats as mandated by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Therefore, it was a case of the cart trying to drive the horse.

Our initiatives did not have legislative backing. This is a reason why some progressive decisions can be reversed, though the panchayats and school committees will resist any move to withdraw powers already delegated to them. The MLAs of course opposed such decentralization as they saw their disempowerment (informal powers of teachers' selection, selection of schools for construction grants) as a corollary to the empowerment of panchayats and other people's groups.

Another key dimension of our work was to make the elementary education system, from the state to the school level, accountable to the people. This meant changing mindsets, which was not an easy task and we made limited progress. A three-pronged strategy was used for this purpose:

a) Sensitisation of education personnel from the Directorate to the school level on the right to education and its implications. Issues of equity, right to learn of *all* children, answerability to the parents and community were discussed and debated in orientation programmes.

b) Transparency in programme implementation: For every activity, detailed information was provided through meetings and distribution of leaflets, radio and newspapers, advertisements, so that the panchayats, school committees and village education committees were clear about their role, the norms and funds to be released to them or spent by the block or district office. Such measures also helped to check misuse of funds, which was a common practice in education department programmes. Since the guidelines were well known to the community at large, the panchayats could not take arbitrary decisions.

c) Making reporting and collection of feedback from the field units includ-

ing peoples' bodies mandatory: The schedule for such meetings was fixed for the entire year. Also the discussion on the feedback received and the meetings held was made an essential part of the review at all higher levels. Every district was ranked every month on a set of pre-defined indicators which included a few that related to their performance on sharing of information and meetings with panchayats, school committees, etc.

The UEE mission in Assam functioned with a set of non-negotiable principles that were binding on the mission personnel. These non-negotiables reflected the commitment to transparency, bottom-up approach, concern for the disadvantaged and the importance of people's involvement. There has been a distinct shift in the working of the district and block education offices who now feel more accountable to show results to people rather than merely reporting to their superior officers. Some of the measures of transparency, the decentralization of decision-making and empowerment of school and village based people's groups to incur expenditure for purchases and recurring expenses for schools and bridge courses also helped in reducing misutilisation of funds.

At the school level, the thrust was on emphasizing accountability of the school for learning by *all* children. The first step was to ensure that schools function regularly for the prescribed number of hours and days so that the instructional time is increased. This was a crucial intervention in remote and educationally backward areas. For this purpose, a series of steps were initiated: (i) Intensive school supervision and academic support visits through block and district level core groups which included inspecting and academic resource persons.

(ii) Officials of the district administration and other development departments started visiting schools to observe teacher and student attendance, classroom teaching and to meet parents.

(iii) A significant role was assigned to the school mapping committee and village education committee in the affairs of running the school. (iv) All government orders regarding school timings, holidays, teachers' responsibilities were printed in local language and discussed in the SMC/VEC meetings. (v) Shiksha Nyaya Manch (Shiksha Adalat), a quasi-judicial forum has been initiated as a grievance redressal mechanism for people's complaints relating to functioning of schools. (vi) Teachers' orientation on the issue of fundamental right to quality education. The teachers' associations were also involved in this effort.

To actually promote accountability for children's learning, the Learning Assurance Programme was initiated with the twin objectives of (a) involving parents in issues related to learning of children and (b) getting teachers to frequently evaluate and analyse children's performance with the objective of taking remedial measures to support the weaker children. As a first step, a Reading Guarantee Campaign was launched to assure the community that each child would develop the basic skills of reading with comprehension in the next one year.

For this effort to succeed, the focus on learning has to be gradual and relentlessly pursued. Such accountability will take a long time to establish, its success related to the extent of involvement and demand generation among the parents and the response of the education system. It would require a sustained effort over several years with a 'rights based' perspective. Also,

unless the quality of governance improves across all sectors and arms of the government, it will be wishful thinking to assume that radical and sustainable changes can be brought about in the education system alone.

If the UEE effort has to succeed in such states or areas where the quality of educational governance is presently unsatisfactory, there is a need for a long term vision and sustained action to promote people's involvement. Equity must be the cornerstone of the entire effort since, in most states, the challenge is to work with the most disadvantaged groups and areas and reduce inequalities in school quality.

Our effort in Assam to ensure regular attendance and continuation of children in formal schools after completion of bridge courses, made us realize the intensity of community and school based effort that is required to help such children and parents adjust to the demanding and rigid school system. The education system has to be sensitized to understand the nature of the comprehensive process required to ensure regular participation of children.

Devolution of powers to panchayat raj institutions and also to people's groups like village education committees and school committees is the key to ensuring greater involvement of people and accountability of the education system. Alongside, it is important to develop and publicize clear norms and criteria for implementing various programmes to ensure that resources are used efficiently and the worst off areas, groups and schools are benefited on a priority basis.

During the past two years, the education system in Assam has been slow to respond to the rights based approach and the emphasis on accountability for results and to people. Transparent and equity oriented action is

yet to become well established as a usual way of work. Currently, there is great pressure from the overall spirit and dynamism of the mission and the response of the people which will need to be sustained. The education system at various levels also lacks the managerial capacity to carry out a large number of activities and spend the huge amounts allocated to each district under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Corruption, which is rampant in the education system, needs to be checked. The pursuit of a norm based approach and effective decentralization requires a high level of political commitment on a sustained basis to weather the opposition to change and build consensus. Our effort in Assam failed to reach the next level of consolidation because the consensus for these changes was lacking amongst the political executive and legislators. While the panchayats, peoples' committees and a large part of the education bureaucracy felt exhilarated and were greatly supportive of the thrust on improved functioning of the system and the measures for decentralization, transparency and accountability, the political system felt threatened. The legislators saw their formal and informal powers of arbitrarily doling out largesse that they have enjoyed for decades being eroded.

We need to appreciate that universalizing quality basic education is a huge challenge which will not succeed unless far reaching systemic changes that question the present pattern of work and distribution of powers are introduced. The biggest disservice to the cause of the right to education is to trivialize the challenge to one of merely providing more resources and 'swelling up' the number of children who are receiving basic education.

Integrating gender concerns

GEETHA B NAMBISSAN

THE decade of the 1990s has shown significant gains in schooling among girls in India. The percentage of girls attending school in the 6-10 year age group in rural areas increased from 55% in 1992-93 to 75% in 1998-99 (NFHS, 2000). Nevertheless, a large number of girls are still out of school and hence access to primary education continues to be a matter of urgency, particularly among girls from economically marginalized and socially vulnerable groups. What is of equal

concern but has received little policy or research attention is the quality of the educational experience in schools. Does 'gender' or the social and cultural definitions of 'male' and 'female' influence the education that girls receive? Do school practices and classroom processes reflect gender equity, i.e. are they gender just?

There are surprisingly few studies on the education of girls in India and barely any systematic focus on school and classroom processes which

include the curriculum, pedagogy, teacher attitudes, peer interaction as well as institutionalized rituals and practices. This paper attempts to understand how gender identity influences the experience of education in schools. Reviewing available studies, it explores how gender is contextualized within schools and pervades classroom processes. It suggests that though the number of girls who enroll in schools is increasing, they may fail to receive an education that is equitable.

The status of the girl child in India relative to boys is reflected in human development indicators such as higher female infant mortality rate, low sex ratio (shockingly so in some parts of the country) and poorer nutritional care. Educational statistics also reveal disparities in school enrolment rates between girls and boys that sharpen at higher stages of education. Feminist scholars have emphasized the importance of a gender perspective to understand and explain the dynamics of education for girl children. While the 'social classification of attributes and qualities into 'masculine' and 'feminine' are reflected in the realm of culture, the material basis and unequal power that underlie social relations between men and women influence the allocation of resources, roles and entitlements at the level of individual households and thereby influences decision-making in relation to the education of children. Other dimensions of social structure in India such as caste and community status are also constitutive of gender dynamics and influence the nature of participation in educational institutions.

The making of gender identity begins in the family as children internalize what are seen as culturally appropriate qualities and attitudes associated with being 'masculine' and 'feminine' through socialization.

Though the process varies among different social groups, the concern with the protection and control of female sexuality and notions of 'family honour' linked to norms of appropriate behaviour for women bring home to girls the centrality of home and hearth in their lives. The division of tasks between parents and among siblings, customs and rituals, toys and games played, exposure to media and so on influences the learning of gender roles and attributes. For instance, nurturing, modesty and submissiveness are seen as important qualities of 'femininity', essential to the survival of the family.

Cultural norms as well as family livelihood strategies place girls' education at a greater risk than that of boys. Studies reveal that parents are less enthusiastic about sending girls to schools for reasons that are economic as well as socio-cultural. The relatively greater concern with the education of sons as compared to daughters is related to the perception of girls' 'temporary' status in their natal homes, the informal social contract that obliges sons to provide for the economic security of parents in their old age, the sexual division of labour within the family, and the relatively greater burden of household and survival tasks placed on girls.

Though girls' education is gradually becoming more of a social norm, it is still heavily influenced by considerations of marriage and 'status production' rather than the need for economic security for the individual or her family. Thus when girls are 'ready for marriage' and social taboos to their mobility set in, or there is need for extra hands within the home, or finances do not permit, it is girls who are more likely to be pulled out of schools than boys. Policy recommendations that emphasize easy access to facilities for schooling, female teachers, child-

care support as well as incentives such as free textbooks and mid-day meals, as well as community mobilization for education, attempt to address some of the cultural and economic constraints to school entry and retention. However, these are mainly directed towards increasing the access to education and encouraging parents to send girls to school rather than with the quality of learning experience for children in general and girls in particular.

Girls are at a disadvantage in relation to boys not merely in relation to their chances of school entry and retention but in the kind of academic environments provided by the home as well. For instance, boys tend to have an advantage over their female siblings in terms of resources invested in their education, time made available for studies within the home, academic support (such as tuition or private coaching) and other educational experiences provided to children. Reviewing available data, Mukhopadhyay comments that 'even the well-off, education oriented families ... view educational achievement, especially in scientific fields, differently for girls than boys, and are less inclined to invest family resources in the academic success of daughters than sons'¹ (1994:108-109). Equally that a larger proportion of boys relative to girls are enrolled in private as compared to government schools, especially in rural areas, receive extra school sup-

1. Scholars have suggested that socialization engenders different abilities and aptitudes among boys and girls that influence learning interests and outcomes. For instance, toys given to girls to play with such as dolls and kitchen ware are seen to orient them to domestic roles and hence constrain future aspirations and career options. Mechanical toys and puzzles, given more to boys than girls, are seen to facilitate spatial and cognitive abilities essential for maths and science. Here boys are seen to have a headstart over girls. (Acker, 1994)

port in the form of tuition (or private coaching) and are more likely to be sent to hostels to pursue their education.

The expansion of the private sector in education as well the growing number of alternative schools (single/two teacher, government/community run schools) has important implications for girls' education. On the one hand an increasing proportion of girls, particularly from lower caste and tribal communities, are being enrolled in government and alternative schools making gender identity a criteria of access to unequal schooling (Ramachandran, 2002). On the other hand, there are also consequences for the self-esteem of girls that Manjrekar calls attention to. She says that, 'The dichotomy that has been set up between boys—superior/private, and girls—inferior/government, has its own tragic consequences for the self-esteem and identity of girls.' She speaks of girls 'who, with considerable anguish, question but also resign themselves to this divide which casts them as educationally less deserving than their brothers' (2003:4582).

Children acquire gender identity and an understanding of gender roles prior to their entering school. However, schools play an important part in reinforcing identities to the detriment of the educational experience that girls receive. Studies point both to the embedding of a 'code' of 'gender appropriate behaviour' in the formal curriculum of official school knowledge as well as in the hidden curriculum communicated informally by the larger culture and practices of schooling, including teacher attitudes and peer interaction (Acker, 1994; Manjrekar, 1999). The section that follows briefly highlights research findings that are pertinent to the quality of the learning experience for girls. The focus is on co-educational schools,

the norm at all stages of education in India.

Gender usually functions as an organizational category in schools. Bhattacharjee's study of two municipal schools in Baroda documents what is quite commonly seen in schools: boys and girls lining up separately for assembly and other formal activities, segregated classroom seating arrangements and roll call taken separately for each sex. Similar groupings are also visible for academic and extra-curricular tasks. School authorities defend these arrangements on grounds of convenience, little appreciating that they tend to convey a stamp of official approval to gender segregation in school (Bhattacharjee, 1999).

The allocation of routine tasks by teachers also reinforces gender stereotypes. In many schools girls can be found doing the more 'light' and decorative tasks such as tidying up and arranging the classroom or handing over a bouquet to visitors, while the help of boys is called for when the task is perceived as requiring 'strength' such as lifting furniture or technical skills such as 'fixing lights' and so on. Where children of lower socio-economic groups predominate, they may be expected to perform more menial tasks, again on the basis of gender.

Rathnam's observations of a primary school in Tamil Nadu where dalit and lower caste children predominate are revealing: 'Chores around the school were divided strictly according to gender. Girls wielded the broom, washed dishes (water pot, glasses), and fetched water if the containers were small. Boys picked up stray bits of paper, carried large drums of water or heavy things, climbed heights when necessary, rang the bell, opened and locked the classrooms,

and ran errands outside the campus' (2002:248).

Gender identity also influences teacher attention and classroom participation. The socialization of girls equips them to more easily play the role of 'good students' – they tend to be well behaved and keen to follow instructions. Paradoxically, these very qualities result in teachers focusing largely on boys who are more noisy and disorderly. Lafrance, in a review of classroom research in North America, says that while boys are censured more frequently because of their misbehaviour, they also receive more 'academic attention', 'instructional emphasis' and positive messages about their potential as compared to girl students. Further, they participate more in the classroom and tend to dominate discussions whereas girls are quieter (Lafrance, 1991).

Similar studies of Indian schools are not available though some scholars do point to girls being quieter in class and participating less frequently than boys in academic discussions. Teacher expectations, appreciating conformity to 'feminine behaviour', also receives mention. Dube's report of her experience in a school in rural Maharashtra is revealing. She notes that while in the 'junior-most class' boys and girls sat together singing the same song, by class VII girls were sari clad and sat on the floor separately from boys who were seated on wooden benches. Despite repeated requests, the girls 'sat coyly and... refused to open their mouths' though the boys 'were cocky... and in full-throated voices sang confidently...' She goes on to say that 'the teacher who was male... seemed to appreciate and understand their (the girls) reticence and shyness' (1988:189-190). Karlekar also describes women teacher trainees who are 'diligent about homework

and perform well in the unit tests.' However, they are also quiet and reserved, 'non-participants' in the classroom, and 'rarely take part in discussions which are dominated by boys' (2000).

Peer interaction is one of the least explored areas of research. To the casual eye, children tend to form single sex peer groups in school. Girls can be found clustering together while boys often occupy larger physical spaces both within and outside the classroom and appear to have a run of the entire playground as well. Bhattacharjee's research shows that both boys and girls maintain boundaries between the genders and informal cross-sex interaction is mainly during moments of conflict between boys and girls (1999).

Bassi, in her study of a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Delhi, suggests that girls actively attempt to create and protect their own physical spaces from boys who are often aggressive in their interaction with girls as also tend to ridicule and dismiss them (Bassi, 2003). School authorities appear to make little effort to encourage healthy relations between boys and girls and in fact tend to use the symbolic divide between them to discipline and control students, especially boys. Making a boy 'sit with the girls' is often used as a form of punishment. By using the crossing of gender boundaries to serve as a 'shaming technique', teachers and school authorities only serve to reinforce the symbolic divide between male and female (Bhattacharjee, 1999).

Teachers prefer to view social interaction between the genders in the framework of sibling relations (Bhattacharjee, 1999; Bassi, 2003). This appears to be a strategy to guard against transgression of norms of social distance, which underlie the

relationship between non-kin men and women. However, they also view boys as 'naturally boisterous' and thereby dismiss rather than seriously address aggressive behaviour against girls often reported in schools.

There is also the issue of sexual abuse, usually kept under wraps. Incidents of sexual abuse of girl students by peers and teachers are occasionally reported in the press but school authorities usually deny that physical security of girls within school is a matter of concern. However, it is obvious that if the culture within school is one of domination and intimidation of girls, it can only further marginalize and constrain their participation in school.

In the average government school, 'official knowledge' is largely limited to the textbook, which forms the basis of curriculum transaction. Lessons are read out, copied and memorized and subsequently evaluated. The boundaries of legitimate (textbook) knowledge are clearly demarcated from popular or 'commonsense knowledge' or children's own understanding and interpretation of what they learn and experience. How does the textbook represent social reality where gender is concerned? What are the qualities that inform the construction of masculinity and femininity as they are represented in the textbook?

Analysis of school textbooks indicates that women lack visibility in the official school curriculum and lessons are largely male centred. Karlekar, drawing on a 1986 study of the Hindi textbooks published by the NCERT, Delhi, showed that 'the ratio of boy-centred stories to girl-centred stories was 21:1. Of the 13 English language textbooks published by the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, boy-centred stories outnumbered girl cen-

tred stories by eighty-one to nine' (2000:83). Bhog's analysis of language textbooks of classes III, V and VII finds that that even in the books in the decade of the 1990s (i.e. after the 1986 National Policy on Education which called for a removal of gender bias in textbooks), women are barely visible. In nearly 50% of the 75 lessons she reviewed, men were the only actors (2002:1640).

Of concern is the portrayal of women in textbooks. In language textbooks women are represented mainly in stereotypical gender roles as wives and mothers, largely confined to the private world of the home. Outside the home they rarely appear in professional roles (other than occasionally as school teachers and at times as nurses) and continue to be largely concerned with the family. The qualities emphasized in relation to female protagonists are familiar: warmth, affection, love, nurture, vulnerability and needing protection. Male characters on the other hand come across as strong, brave, independent and determined (*ibid*).

A few lessons do portray female protagonists in more active and challenging roles that differ from the usual gender stereotypes. Bhog points out that in her review of 75 lessons in the language textbooks, barely three 'make a genuine attempt to represent women in a different light' (2002: 1640). One of the examples is the lesson on Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi whose story provides enormous potential for challenging traditional stereotypes of women. However, Bhog shows that while qualities such as 'courage', 'strength' and 'struggle' are given premium in narratives of 'great men', Laxmibai is depicted as 'a great rider and fighter' but nevertheless 'vulnerable', 'prone to depression' (at the death of her husband and son) and

'doubt'. The analysis of textbooks suggest that school knowledge plays an important role in reinforcing and 'naturalizing' identities of male and female that need to be seriously contested. They are based on distorted portrayals of gender roles that bear little semblance to the diversity of roles that women play in society and offer poor role models for girls.

When curricular choices are made after secondary school, girls tend to cluster in what are perceived as the more 'feminine' arts and humanities courses, while a relatively larger proportion of boys are found in 'career oriented' science, commerce and, more recently, computer courses. These subject choices reflect gender inequality in education and constrain future options and life chances of girls.

Why do a large majority of girls opt out of science and show a disinclination for mathematics? Some scholars foreground gender socialization and the lesser exposure of girls to games and experiences that develop abilities (spatial, abstract thinking) and interests that orient them towards science and mathematics as compared to boys. Subject choices are also partly influenced by parental concern that daughters do not jeopardize their chances for a 'successful' marriage by aspiring to non-conventional careers that interfere with familial responsibilities and expectations.

As mentioned earlier, girls may not be provided academic support that encourages their aspirations for professional and technical education, as are their male siblings. There is also the problem of access where facilities for science education are concerned. Mukhopadhyay reports that, 'All girl schools often lack science streams ... which forces them to go to coeducational schools. Even where science streams/options exist, labs/equipment

are often inferior to equivalent male schools' (Mukhopadhyay, 1994:128).

Most research suggests that the official and the hidden curriculum in schools tends to reinforce rather than challenge the gender based subject choices of boys and girls. Studies point out that science and mathematics are presented as 'masculine' subjects in school. Women appear in marginal roles in science textbooks and there is an absence of positive female role models for girls to identify with. For instance, a colourful picture in a lesson on solids, liquids and gases in the class III EVS textbook has men and women in it but in strikingly different roles. Women are shown as wives and mothers and in passive roles. Men on the other hand come across as 'doers', their 'work related' roles and technical skills receive emphasis.

Language textbooks at the primary stage often contain a lesson or two that orient children to science. For instance, the NCERT prescribed language reader for class V has a lesson on 'The Story of Science' that is a description of *man* and *his* discoveries. The only mention of a woman is to show that with scientific advances travel time has drastically reduced. The story is told of the 'beautiful young Chinese princess' who was sent by her father to marry the king of Persia but married his son instead because the king died in the two years it took her to reach Persia! The readers are informed that in today's world, she would have reached in two hours. The two scientists mentioned and whose pictures are given are Newton and Marconi.

Some textbooks carry the story of Madame Curie, an important role model for girls. Bhog argues that Maria Curie's portrayal is treated through a gender lens as the narrative

highlights Maria's domestic responsibilities and emphasizes her ability to successfully take on the burden of home and work. To Bhog, these are narrative devices employed so that women are 'tamed into not being too out of this world, too different, too challenging' (2002:1641).

As mentioned earlier, scholars also point to the unequal treatment of girl pupils in comparison to boys in the classroom. Research by western scholars on the experience of girls in maths and science classrooms points to the hidden curriculum, of teacher bias towards boys, their critical attitudes towards academic work of girls, the male-centred tasks and activities as well as the 'masculine' atmosphere in science labs as partly responsible for undermining girls' interests and sense of confidence in these subjects (Kirkup and Keller, 1992).

The foregoing discussion raises a number of issues that go far beyond the present concern of merely bringing girls to primary school or even increasing transition rates to middle school. If education is the process of developing personhood and capacities such as independent thinking, autonomy and critical judgment, then schools must endeavour to provide the institutional space to facilitate this. Where girls are concerned, available research suggests that schools often tend to reinforce narrowly constructed identities, and stereotypical gender roles, thereby constraining their choices and options.

Though schools are embedded in the larger social structure characterized by hierarchical gender relations and ideologies that devalue the position of women, attempts must be made, to push the limits and explore the possibilities of change through schools, particularly as they offer public space that is obliged to be informed by prin-

ciples of equality. Thus it is necessary to critically review school knowledge and pedagogic practices from the perspective of gender equity and provide meaningful learning opportunities for all children. The hidden curriculum is of particular concern as it provides a powerful learning context (even when little teaching and learning appears to be overtly going on), since gender is used as an organizational principle and a mechanism for control in school, pervading teacher attitudes and peer interaction as well. However, it is also important to understand how girls (particularly from the hitherto educationally deprived groups) interpret and act on the messages they receive in school and how it influences their self worth, confidence and sense of autonomy.

In order to sensitize teachers to these concerns, a gender perspective must be integrated in teacher education and training programmes and teachers involved in equity strategies that initiate changes in school policy and classroom practices. Researchers, activists and practitioners will have a crucial role to play in expanding the knowledge base and providing inputs for a gender equitable curriculum and pedagogy. The overall policy framework that informs education is important. In the present scenario where we are witnessing the spread of a communal agenda in education, with its glorification of tradition and women's duty in relation to the stability of the family and 'cohesion of society', the education of girls is at particular risk. It is time that gender concerns are brought center-stage and made a critical issue in debates on education.

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Unpacking the 'quality' of schools

ANITA RAMPAL

WHAT lies 'Beyond Access'? Why is it that increasingly we allude to access as the basic issue, while the 'quality' of education is relegated to the so-called second level of problems or priorities? What is implied by the term quality of education, especially when it is perceived either chronologically or even financially as something that can be tackled once the primary problem of getting children to school has been resolved?

Moreover, this ostensible dichotomy between 'access' and 'beyond', or between the 'basic' provision and its 'quality', seems to have been amplified more recently, largely in the last decade, to somehow justify not being able to do both simultaneously, as had earlier been assumed. The world-over, universal elementary education has been achieved principally through state provision of compulsory school-

ing, where quality was not differentially reserved to be doled out either 'later' or 'only to some'.

The question of quality was first raised in policy debates in India around 1929 in connection with the Hartog Committee Report, which concluded that 'expansion had been gained at the cost of quality' and that 'consolidation should be adopted in preference to diffusion' of mass primary education. These recommendations had then been strongly opposed by several national leaders, who saw in this deliberate dichotomy between quality and quantity a discriminatory colonial policy for India.

In fact, once the Compulsory Education Act was passed in Britain in 1870 there was a vociferous demand by Indian leaders for state provision of mass schooling and similar legislation here, compelling the first Indian Education Commission in 1882 to seriously deliberate on these issues. Indeed, for the next 70 years, through the struggle for an independent nation and the making of its Constitution, this commitment to provide

* Cases 1-3 are based on detailed classroom observations of schools in Nalanda district by Dr Suman Singh, Gaya College, Bihar, and Ms. Sharmila, Ankur, New Delhi, conducted during a participatory study of the SPEED programme supported by Unicef.

'free and compulsory education' to every child was tenaciously reiterated.

However, soon after the first decade of independence was over and it was clear that commensurate financial commitments to ensure the constitutional promise were not forthcoming, state policy strategically shifted focus from compulsion to persuasion (Juneja, 2003). This consciously promoted the belief that only some genuinely wanted education while most others, who also contributed to the high levels of 'wastage' by dropping out of schools without learning much, were unwilling. J.P. Naik, former Educational Advisor to the Government of India, candidly wrote about the vested interests demanding greater financial allocations and subsidies for higher education meant for the privileged social groups at the cost of funds for mass primary education. 'We were in fact called fools who try to educate those who do not come to school and do not want to learn. The first duty of a government, we were told, was to educate those who were willing to learn. The task of those who do not even want to learn should come later' (Naik, 1982).

The above remark openly reflects the 'first' and 'later' dichotomy, between competing priorities for government funds, deliberately divided between those who are 'willing' and others who 'do not want to learn'. In fact, this myth of the unwilling masses has continued almost unchallenged for several decades, and has been debunked only in the last few years by several studies, including the Public Report on Basic Education (Probe Team, 1999). The disadvantaged are increasingly looking towards education as a possible way out of their condition and are, in fact, dropping out of school only because they learn nothing and have lost faith in the ability of the state system

to provide quality education. Professor Yashpal had highlighted this in his preface to the report 'Learning Without Burden' (MHRD, 1993) when he wrote that those who dropped out were probably superior to those children who continued in the system because they had not 'compromised with non-comprehension', with the meaninglessness of what they were being compelled to do in school.

With the myth of the unwilling masses fast losing ground, it is becoming convenient to articulate competing priorities for funds in terms of other dichotomies, such as 'access first' and 'quality later'. Unfortunately, several well-meaning initiatives are also taking this line, mobilizing tremendous efforts to enrol children into schools without simultaneously demanding that these be restructured for better quality. With increasing internal and external pressures to show results, the state is advocating all means of cutting costs through what it calls 'alternative arrangements' such as the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Centres or other such 'alternative' schools.

Various euphemisms have been used to denote these alternatives, ranging from Shishu Shiksha Kendras to Rajiv Gandhi Pathshalas or Vaikalpik Shalas, and hundreds of thousands of para-teachers, variously called *acharya, guruji, sahayika* or *shiksha mitra*, are perfunctorily trained and employed as contract workers for a fraction of the salary of a regular teacher. State provision of schooling has now been starkly stratified, and the poor are offered a low cost and low quality version in keeping with their position and capacity to pay. Ironically, these poor communities are asked to arrange for the space or even build a structure themselves. More significantly, the Constitution has

been amended to allow for this dilution, and the proposed Free and Compulsory Education Act (draft, January 2004) is now trying to create further inequalities and institutionalize dichotomies between those who can or cannot pay for their schooling.

The 93rd amendment bill (passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2002 as the 86th Amendment Act) had allowed the spirit of the original Article 45 of the Constitution to be radically altered. 'The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years, *in the manner as the state may by law determine*.' This additional clause allows the state to get away with whatever 'quality' it deems fit, for those who actually need much more investment and affirmative action. It also abandons its commitment for 'equality' and 'removal of disparities' through the common school system, upheld by the National Policy on Education.

In fact, the proposed Free and Compulsory Education Act, meant to serve as the central legislation for the 86th Amendment Act, is diluting even the notion of a school or teacher to justify a discriminatory system introduced through a differentiated typology of government schools, such as the 'approved', 'recognized fee-charging', and 'transitional schools (defined as an EGS centre or alternative school)', etc. The proposed act states that for those habitations or groups of children for whom the establishment of approved schools or alternative arrangements is not immediately feasible, the government may cause transitional schools to be established. It is indeed ironical that more than half a century after the Constitution had envisioned 'free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years', the proposed act will legally wash its hands off this

basic responsibility on the grounds of what is not *immediately feasible*.

In some recent studies the ‘quality’ of education is mentioned superficially by looking at parameters such as the attendance of children or the actual time spent in school without classroom observations. For instance, the Pratichi Education Report from West Bengal presents a rather cursory comparison between the quality of primary schools and the alternative schools – the Shishu Shikha Kendras (SSK). The overview of the report rightly stresses that the ‘poor quality of teaching not only makes the children learn poorly, but also widens the gap between the two classes – one which can buy education, and the other, which cannot. It is the poor quality of teaching that forces children to seek private tuition (an issue of major concern in WB).’ However, the analysis fails to go beyond surface perceptions. Moreover, the section on ‘private tuition and quality of education’ draws conclusions about quality from whether children can write their names or not, thereby trivializing the issue.

Having termed SSKs as ‘great achievers at extremely low cost’, the report further compares how parents of these children seem ‘less dissatisfied’ with the quality of provision than those of children studying in formal primary schools. Satisfaction is clearly a relative notion and is crucially linked to expectations and aspirations. Poor parents may have good reasons to be satisfied with a school where the teacher comes regularly and does not discriminate against their child, irrespective of what goes on in the name of teaching and, more crucially, of the quality of learning. However, a school that functions as minimally as most SSKs (or for that matter even formal primary schools) do, cannot qualify as a great achiever, even if the extremely

low-cost is what makes it attractive to policy-makers.

The SSK is anchored problematically on a ‘retired’ structure, with women teachers who are selected only when they are over-age and therefore unqualified to demand a regular job. The *sahayikas* are ‘aged women over 40,’ in the words of the programme officials, who even justify the need to select not ‘caring young women’ but ‘aged’ ones for their ‘motherly’ qualities! The trainers are retired officers and inspectors from the Education Department, usually in the age group of 65–75 years, and the training is gender skewed, with old male veterans often patronizingly lecturing to the all-women cadre of diffident housewives.

These personnel bring with them not only limited resources of energy, but more significantly, traditional mindsets conditioned by the existing hierarchical system. This political economy of selecting retired teachers and trainers, who would by their very nature not make any demands on the system, is at the heart of its low quality potential. It needs to be underscored that to provide good quality education to those consistently excluded by the system requires an expanded vision, that voices a demand for change, both within and outside the system.

The SSK has provided access to education to children in remote, school-less habitations or in areas where schools are overcrowded. A reasonable teacher pupil ratio of 1:30, adequate space for each child and the involvement of the community in ensuring regular attendance of the teachers and children are some of the factors that have contributed to its functioning relatively better than many dysfunctional primary schools. However, the classroom interaction was no different, often worse, because these *sahayikas*, older and not having been

well trained, seemed understandably more insecure and heavily dependent on the textbook. Many *sahayikas* talked in a self-conscious, loud and high-pitched voice, and expected loud answers in chorus from the students. There was a lot of mindless repetition, often to the point of utter distraction, reminiscent of similar ‘drilling’ sessions we had witnessed during their training programme.

We all know of multiplication tables that children are heartlessly made to learn ‘by heart’, but at an SSK training we saw the use of addition tables, unflinchingly repeated over and over again. ‘*Ek jog ek dui, dui jog ekeen, teen jog ek...*’ (One plus one two, two plus one three, three plus one four, and so on). In addition, there was an absurd attempt to render it ‘joyful’, with little understanding of how children learn concepts of ‘number’ or addition. All kind of cosmetic padding was added to the exercise (literally so!) which resulted in the 70-plus trainer hopping single-legged, perilously unsteady, while chanting the addition tables.

The same *mantra* continued unabated through several mindless exercises which generated a lot of noise and energy – a dramatically loud and breathless *ek, ek, ek, ek, ek jog ek dui* ending with a wobbly jump. But that was all. No concepts of arithmetic got reinforced through all this rigmarole, though it is another matter that seeing a teacher wobble and warble through much skip and song may indeed be joyful for children, and may help the school system unlearn some of its traditional notions of authority.

Choosing local women from the community, as had been done for the remote and underserved habitations under the Shiksha Karmi programme in Rajasthan, has its advantages, but only when the selection and orienta-

tion processes ensure that the teachers are geared for this challenging task. In this case, the fact that SSK sahayikas were locally recruited from the same community did not mean that they had a close relationship with the children. Being from the same social class may preclude blatant discrimination, but much more is required in the student-teacher interaction to ensure that children do learn better.

A matter of serious concern is that the SSK model, instead of being acknowledged as an interim short-term measure for disadvantaged children, before being accommodated in the formal mainstream schools, is now being formulated as the *alternate mainstream* model in West Bengal, even for the middle school. With about 15,000 SSKs or more already, it is now envisaged that through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan these would be extended into an MSK for children up to class VIII, so that there is no need to plan for their 'mainstreaming'.

This last section attempts to unpack what happens within classrooms, to allow readers to look for the 'quality' of children's schooling in the differentiated provision doled out to them. We present selected excerpts from three types of government schools – a 'model' school, a single teacher school for the OBCs, and an alternative or 'community based school' from Nalanda district of Bihar, which have been part of a programme for quality improvement:

Case 1: The 'Model' School?
The Residential Model Middle School (RMMS) has an imposing double-storey structure and 1700 children enrolled, though only 1200 were present on the day of the visit. The head teacher is normally on his toes, supervising students on 'cleaning duty', and the running of classes (including the running mass of students, pummeling

each other and rushing to get seats in crowded rooms). He is under pressure to enrol even more, but the space is constrained and classrooms are already overcrowded. He takes pride that despite being surrounded by so-called 'English medium' schools, parents still prefer his school.

All classes look alike – bursting at the seams, children sitting on benches as well as on, over and under the desks, with some sprawled on the floor. Teachers have identical teaching styles and they read from the textbooks or give instructions. There are no teaching learning materials, the methodologies are far from joyful or even meaningful, and children have understandably learnt very little. Then why are parents so satisfied with this model school?

Class I Teacher: Ms. Asha Kumari, Number of children: around 100/140. Grade I has 140 children on roll but fortunately for those present about 30-40 children are absent. Almost 25 children squat on the floor, while boys and girls sit on benches in separate rows. The class teacher starts calling out the roll numbers, repeating names of those absent – 'Terah, Rajesh Kumar, Rajesh Kumar, nahi hai kya re?' (Number 13? Is Rajesh not there?) A good 20 minutes are over by the time she finishes. All along she demands complete silence, which never happens, despite her repeated shouting '*ai halla, ai*' (why this noise?) and the brandishing of her stick.

She writes the alphabets '*ka, kha, ga...*' and instructs the children to copy, sitting down with their scholarship forms. The noise level picks up. They have done this task earlier and are not interested in repeating it. One child writes the English alphabets instead. Others prefer chatting. Asha tries to reach some children but can never get close enough to look into

their copies. '*Padhna aata hai re? Padho to, nahi aata hai to dekho*' (Do you know how to read? Read, if you cannot then look here). She starts reading loudly from the blackboard. Children follow her in chorus '*ka, kha, ga, gha*'. Reading aloud of alphabets is the only way of engaging the children. After it is over, the noise continues and she yells, '*ai halla, arre!*' (hey, no noise!) again and again, but to no avail. The bell rings.

In the next period she asks them to open a chapter '*Saahasi Balak*' from the Hindi textbook for reading aloud. The response to this command is mixed. At a point there is complete chaos, and she seems in a fix, embarrassed at her own helplessness as she spots the researcher taking notes. She has another trick up her sleeve. She draws pictures of a mango, a pencil, a glass, a leaf, etc. Children look up with curiosity and suddenly it is quiet. (Now, this is a new task!) She points at the objects one by one and asks '*ee kya hai?*' (what is this?) She gets a loud choral response. It has worked! One more way of engaging the attention of the full class. Satisfied, she goes back to the first picture and repeats again, and again. The responses get weaker as the novelty wears off.

Class II Teacher: Mohammad Atiqueed din, Number of children: 65. Atique has a commanding voice and anticipating '*halla*' during the roll-call, he announces, '*Koi halla karega to bahut pitega!*' (Those who make noise will get beaten hard!). It has its effect. Once the ritual is over, Atique's table is flooded with scholarship forms and he takes his time collating those.

He then turns towards the blackboard and instructs students to copy the three headings – *shabd* (words), *ling nirnay* (gender determination) and *wakya* (sentence). He writes under the 'words' category the following:

dahi (curd), *sadak* (road), *moti* (pearl), *tamasha* (circus), *aag* (fire), *baat* (talk/issue), *raat* (night), *din* (day), etc.

He announces the task – ‘*Inka ling nirnay karna hai aur wakya banana hai, kya karna hai?*’ (The gender has to be specified and sentences have to be made. What has to be done?). All say in chorus, ‘*Wakya banana hai*’ (Sentences have to be made). ‘*Bolo to ‘ling’ me kya likhoge?*’ (Say, what is to be written under gender?) All quiet (naturally!). A little annoyed, he then says, ‘*Bataya tha na ki jis se purush jati ka bodh hota hai usko puling kahte hain*’ (Hadn’t I said that the word that signifies the male is termed as the masculine gender). He knows that children will have difficulty in doing the task, as it has been framed. So he proceeds to make sentences himself, with each word one by one, saying – ‘*roti jal gayee*’ (the roti got burnt), ‘*raatho gayee*’ etc. Not once does he ask them to provide further examples, even though these are simple sentences from the children’s own repertoire.

He keeps moving in the room, brandishing the stick and asking them to complete the task. Children try to write but none of them manages to correctly note down what he is dictating. The bell rings and Atique gestures to ‘correct’ the exercise, by peering into their copies before leaving for another class.

The teacher assumes that the ‘exercise’ cannot be done by children, and soon proceeds to supply the answers. This is the typical style of conventional teaching – to first mystify the task, as done here by framing it in awkward words that deliberately distance it from the children’s experience, and to then assume the role of the knowledge giver! Children by this age speak their language perfectly and are well aware of sophisticated rules of

grammar. If only they were allowed to speak and participate in class. They would laugh if we spoke to them with genders reversed or with any of the rules used incorrectly; they need to be encouraged to see the patterns of their own speech and to articulate the rules for themselves.

However, the formal language of the classroom usually alienates the child (Rampal, 2003) even though she may fluently speak in her first language. Indeed the hegemony of such sanskritised Hindi, in its ‘standard’ or *manak* form, needs to be interrogated and discussed with teachers. This is critical in the case of tribal children, who speak languages which teachers do not understand, and are considered much lower in the hierarchy of status.

The hegemony of English is, of course, another matter, and has given the additional edge to the marketable ‘quality’ of private schools. As the head teacher had mentioned, parents preferred this model school to the English medium schools in the vicinity. Is their level of satisfaction a good indicator of its high ‘quality’? Or does it only show that the school manages to function, no matter how ritualistically?

Case 2: A Lone Shutting Teacher – A ‘model’ for the OBCs? This school is over 30 years old and serves the predominantly Other Backward Caste (OBC) communities of the village (Kanchanpura). Of the three rooms, one is reserved for the Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) meetings and materials. The headmaster and effectively the lone teacher of the school tells us that there are 169 children enrolled, of which 127 are in classes I, II, III, while 42 are in classes IV and V. A community member tells us that the second teacher hardly ever comes.

Classes: I, II, III; Teacher: R.P. Sinha; Number of children present:

40/127. The room is well ventilated but not clean. Alphabets and numerals are painted on the walls. The children all sit mixed, neither in graded groups nor class wise. He brings a pocket board and asks them what it is. Then he himself answers and mechanically shows each alphabet card, asking only the class I children to respond. There is a lot of noise and he scolds them again and again. He holds a bamboo stick and uses it to point to the cards. Children continue chatting as he leaves for class IV and V. Soon he returns, and this time addressing class II, he picks up a few plants and asks their names, for which they give the local names.

He continues his monologue, asking and immediately answering his own questions.

Name some flowers.

Have you seen a lotus flower?

It grows in a pond, no?

What is the colour?

It is red, no?

How does it look?

Lotus floats in water, no?

Now write the word (lotus).

Then he switches to class I children and asks them to identify the alphabets from a chart brought from the CRC room. The chart is hung high up, from where most children cannot read. Next he turns to the class III students and asks them what they are to do today. Before they reply, he himself names some fruits. Not surprisingly, any question that demands more than a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ seems difficult for them to answer. Class III students can ‘read’ only the poems they have learnt by heart, but no other text.

Classes IV, V; the same teacher, shuttling in and out; Number of children: 10/42. Most benches are empty and the children say this is generally so, since some have joined the nearby private school, while others have chosen

to play and not attend school. They are asked to read a chapter on rural life from the Hindi textbook. They read haltingly. He asks one girl to stand up and read till he comes back from the next room. In response to every instruction the children say 'yes sir'. On his return he asks them to do the question-answers given after the lesson. When a girl writes a long answer he says she could have written a simple, shorter one. He then dictates all the answers.

Case 3: 'Community Based Schools' – more euphemisms for the poor: Village Kharjamma has about 80-90 households and a community based school (the name for the EGS centre in Bihar) runs in the house of the teacher, Renu Kumari. About 20 children sit in two rows in the passage of the house, with boys and girls facing each other. There is neither a blackboard nor any other material. In the courtyard three male members of the family are busy chatting, including Mr Pandey, the husband of the teacher, and begin to leave on seeing a visitor. Mr Pandey goes out to fetch more children and the strength soon rises to 30. The boys are younger than the girls, as the older boys move to the government school or to a private school located in Maghra.

Children have been asked to write tables as far as they 'remember'. The atmosphere is quiet. Renu Kumari shouts at one child, in Magahi (the local dialect), '*Chhav ke teen kar delhin; ab na hatayee galti na? Kalse pitaibe*' (You wrote three instead of six. If you repeat the same mistake you will get a beating). Some boys are writing *ginti* from 1 to 10, while others are writing Hindi alphabets. She starts dictating the table of 22 to Guddu. She proudly declares that this student is ahead of all as he can even 'read' the tables he has crammed, up to '*baaiska*' (table of 22). '*Beeskatak*

to kaigo janta hai' (many know up to 20). She moves to Kaju to dictate the table of six – '*Chhav ka pahara likh to Kaju; jaldi, jaldi, thoda teji me*' (quick, write the table of 6).

Grade III girls have been instructed to read the chapter titled '*Chatur Lomdi*' (clever fox). They have difficulty and haltingly speak aloud separate syllables. Since reading and writing cannot be done simply by copying or through memorization, none of the children here have acquired even the most rudimentary of these skills. '*Sir, dekhin na*' interrupts Kaju with all the tables he has written (he addresses her as 'Sir'). She corrects what she had dictated and pats his back, instructing him to next dictate the table of 10 to Pooja.

Sulekha has finished writing the multiplication table of two. Renu instructs a senior girl to recite the table and Sulekha follows. Sulekha, like most others, has scripted the numerals as if drawing a *rangoli* pattern, but cannot read anything, and like most others is waiting for someone to come and recite what she has 'written'.

It is now two hours since 'teaching' began. Mamta, after enthusiastically drawing some pictures is yawning and lying prostrate on the floor. She refuses to write despite Renu's instructions. Most of the children are by now in no mood to continue. Guddu Kumar has progressed further today. He is doing '*taeiska*' (table of 23) without being able to recognize any alphabets. He cannot read and only guesses from the photographs. In fact, most children 'read' only through memory, holding the book as a prop in the act. Within two hours they have all reached saturation; the teacher is tired and the children visibly bored.

'Teaching' tables up to 40 in class I, which they cannot even read?

The instructor had no plan in mind and continued to assign tasks haphazardly, moving randomly from child to child, without realising what they were or were not learning. She had slotted children purely in terms of the tables they had memorised, since most had not learnt anything else, even after two years. The teacher was also terribly insensitive to the children's emotions (making the whole class publicly humiliate late-comers, calling them names), and clearly needed intensive training.

Renu has evolved a style according to her particular conditions and concept of 'teaching', with no understanding at all of children's learning. Tables were convenient as an unguided 'writing' task, to keep them busy, and she was proud that she remembered hers up to 30. Many regular school teachers too were found to be aiming for this feat, even to go up to 40 in the first year! Anyone who casually peeps inside the classroom may even get impressed. In any case, who really cares to look beyond the facade of what is popularly called 'access'?

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Reaching for quality in the countryside

PADMANABHA RAO, RADHIKA HERZBERGER
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OVER a period of twenty years, Rishi Valley Education Centre has created a multi-grade multi-level programme for elementary education known as 'The School in a Box'. The nomenclature is meant to reflect both the programme's compactness and its portability: like a medium sized suitcase it can be carried around by a single teacher. The Box, has in fact, been transported to many regions in India. It is being used in several districts of Andhra Pradesh, including its tribal zones, in Karnataka's formal government schools, in Chennai's municipal schools, and in non-formal schools of UP, Kerala and Jharkhand. The original Box, in Telugu, has been transcreated in tribal variants of Telugu, Hindi, Kannada and a version in Tamil will soon emerge. Adaptations of the 'School in a Box' are being used in upward of 20,000 schools in the country.

Broadly speaking, the idea of replacing textbooks with a graded series of cards emerged after observing the ground reality in existing government schools of the eighties. Mono-grade schools with one teacher assigned to each class in effect functioned as multi-grade ones due to frequent absence of one teacher or another. On the other hand, teachers expected students to learn what was taught within a single, clearly defined unit of time, irrespective of disparity

in their learning abilities. Half of the entire student body in most elementary schools was at the class I stage, with enrolment tapering off strongly at higher ones. A large number of children remained at the same stage from one year to the next. All this indicated not only a high dropout rate but also a very low rate of learning among those who stayed in school. Teachers were helpless because they didn't have systematic support to help them handle multilevel situations effectively.

An analysis of existing textbooks also revealed their distance from the child's immediate world. The books exhibited a top down approach, with little regard for drawing the child into a new world of learning. Our analysis led to a determination to overthrow the 'tyranny' of the textbooks in the two rural schools we ran. Thus began the slow building up of alternate learning materials, augmented in the classroom with puppets, games and puzzles. The change in student attitudes was striking when the dropout rate gradually began dropping to almost zero.

Over a period of time, a set of work material emerged in the form of a series of cards in the three disciplines of language, mathematics and environmental studies. The cards represented a breaking down of the learning process into smaller units; groups

of cards were then assembled into a set of 'milestones', which led the students from level I to level V. Each of the milestones consists of five units: introduction of a new skill or concept; learning to apply the skill or concept; evaluating what is learnt; remedial and enrichment components. The whole constitutes what we call 'Ladder of Learning' or 'Achievement Ladder'. There is a pictorial representation of the Ladder prominently displayed on the classroom wall, with each step and milestone marked out in sequential order. The teacher has a clear understanding of every child's progress, at his or her own pace, through the curriculum.

The evaluation component or diagnostic test forms the penultimate space of each of the learning units or milestone, clearing the pathway to remedial and enrichment cards. The process ensures that each milestone on the Ladder of Learning is reached, and the cycle of learning, applying and enriching a skill or concept completed.

After an initial period when they are introduced to the logos connecting the cards with the Ladder of Learning, students learn to manoeuvre across the Ladder on their own. The teacher in the multi-grade classroom becomes a facilitator, not a lecturer. She moves around the classroom explaining new concepts, correcting exercises, and recording student progress.

The educational scenario in today's schools contrives to properly instruct largely the educated and the well to do. The routine of students listening to teachers explain a concept, of applying the concepts through homework exercises completed with the help of parents willing to spend time with the child or to hire tutors, is beyond the reach of low income groups and first generation learners. This sequence of understanding, applying,

testing, remedying and enriching has to be built into the classroom environment in the form of work materials and time spent, if standard requirements of basic education – that require schools to take responsibility for teaching students to read and write and do basic arithmetic – are to be met. Our Box is constructed to meet this basic demand.

The Box does more than address the needs of the average learner; it is able to accommodate both fast learners and slow ones. Because individual lessons are not constructed to fit into fixed time slots, students move up the Ladder at their own speed. And children in the countryside who are in and out of school grazing cows or looking after their younger siblings, and who find themselves at a loss when they come back to school after long absences, can return to the step on the Ladder where they had left off, and move ahead instead of having to repeat the entire academic session. This feature of the Box lends itself for use in 'transitional schools', where children who have dropped out of school or working children who have remained illiterate have to be brought up to standards consonant with their age.

Creation of work materials eventually resulting in the graded collection called 'The School in a Box' had begun in the mid-eighties, with the modest goal of solving local problems in the one-room satellite school situated in Valmikivanam, a village of settled tribal Boyas and Dalits.

Over the decade, with help from central government grants, the number of satellite schools grew to sixteen. This expansion in the number of schools was accompanied by steady growth and refinement of work materials. P. K. Srinivasan, a passionate mathematics teacher from Chennai, contributed to the mathematics kit as did teachers from Rishi Valley School.

Young men and women from surrounding villages were trained in the use of graded materials and new arrangement of the classroom demanded by the multi-grade approach. A system of monitoring teachers at the satellite schools was devised with the help of the Ladder. At the end of each week teachers were expected to note down every student's exact place on the Ladder. This provided the supervisor with an immediate picture of a child's progress across several weeks; the immobility of entire groups of children was to be read as a clear sign of the teacher's prolonged absence.

With teachers required to attend group discussion sessions, and workshops on the Rishi Valley campus and schools hosting 'metric melas', the satellite schools and their teachers were drawn into networks. Support systems for the satellite school teachers was anchored at one end in the community, with the help of mothers' committees set up for monitoring schools, and the Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources on campus at the other end. Metric melas are daylong community festivals, whose aim is to convey concepts of mass, length and time and their units. These are celebrated by host schools with all the fanfare and bustle that accompanies traditional melas; specially prepared foods are bought and sold, fathers and mothers are weighed and statistical averages calculated later in the classrooms, as part of the arithmetic work materials.

The Environmental Studies curriculum includes extensive village surveys of local flora and fauna, types of housing, festivals and farming patterns, and so on. The data is then organised into categories and attractively displayed on the classroom wall, giving children a sense of their own community, its water resources,

its domesticated animals and natural flora and fauna. In these and other ways, local culture is drawn into the language of the classroom and students made to feel at ease in school. Simultaneously, respect and tolerance for other cultures and concern for the natural environment are values woven into the work materials.

The idea that schools can be resource centres for their immediate neighbourhood, central to Rishi Valley Education Centre's philosophy, found new expression in this programme. With each satellite school providing support systems to government schools in their vicinity, the principle was extended to cover all the peripheries.

The Box met its first field test outside Rishi Valley in Mehbubnagar district, when the team was invited by Unicef and the Education Department of the state government to conduct an intensive 75-day summer school programme in the district. The aim was to prepare girls who had joined class I, but subsequently dropped out of school, to enter class two. The programme was extremely successful, with 96.4% of the total children mainstreamed into the second standard.

Rishi Valley's influence spread over a larger area when a group of concerned government teachers from H.D. Kote district in Karnataka who faced problems endemic to schools in our neighbourhood, began an association with our educational team. Eventually, the Karnataka team created their own graded materials in Kannada, which they called Nalli Kalli. They independently extended their programme, having reached an agreement with the machinery of the state, to other districts of Karnataka.

It was the collaboration with the Integrated Tribal Development

Agency (ITDA) in 1997 and 1998 that greatly enlarged the scope of Rishi Valley's involvement on the broader canvas of education. A two-year memorandum of understanding required us to create a complete set of graded materials for class I and II in the areas of arithmetic and environmental science, and to create a language version in the local dialect of Telugu. We were expected to set up 2000 schools, some of them in completely inaccessible areas of the forest, and to train local school teachers and schools run by volunteers (*mabadi*) with meagre qualifications in the multi-grade multi-level classroom pedagogy.

In addition, we were to monitor the progress of the educational complex we had helped establish. Whereas the Rishi Valley satellite schools and, to a large extent, the schools in H.D. Kote district had evolved organically, at their own pace, the ITDA undertaking was to be completed in a single two-year sweep. Resource persons and teachers had to be trained, training manuals written, and a set of monitoring tools devised. When it became apparent that the existing Telugu language version of the Box differed considerably from the dialect in use in tribal areas, it had to be recast, incorporating regional lore. Sixty bright local teachers helped create a new version of the Box to be used in Paderu and Rampachudavaram. The new set of cards was called 'Anandalahari Education Materials'.

The training of 2000 teachers in the multi-grade methodology was a formidable task. The training had to be accomplished in relays; each batch of between 130 or so trainees was divided into five groups, with 30 trainees or less in each group. One previously trained Mandal Resource Persons (MRP) was put in charge of training

each group; two resource persons from Rishi Valley (RRP) assisted him. Each group had its own Box to work with in hands-on sessions. MRPs and RRPs changed with every incoming batch to ensure that the training remained a relay and did not become a marathon.

A month prior to the commencement of the teacher training programme, a model school was set up in the vicinity at Kothavalasa village. The model school had two classes: one for mathematics and the other for language. Two local persons and two RRPs were in charge of these facilities. Each trainee group of about 25 teachers spent two hours observing the transactions in the two classrooms. The observer teachers were given a format to help focus on salient features of the methodology.

One truly original aspect of this venture lay in the unique system of monitoring support that was evolved in order to sustain, on a much larger scale, such new approaches, processes and materials in schools across a geographically wider area. The workings of the monitoring system are best described in the words of the IAS officer who presided over the educational programme:¹

'The school complex resource person is expected to visit every single teacher school compulsorily on a fixed day of the month. He spends the whole day in the school and observes how the kit is being implemented, what the problem areas are and then offers on the spot solutions. A well thought-out proforma has been worked out on the basis of which he interacts with the teacher. He verifies attendance patterns, takes note of long term

1. Jayesh Ranjan, A Multigrade Trainers' Resource Pack. Background Documents-IKFI Rishi Valley Education Centre, Rishi Valley, 2003, p. 55.

absentees, and conducts a simple test with the children to ascertain their progress since the previous visit. He is expected to interact with the villagers, initiate and organise school beautification, mid-day meals, etc. This kind of monthly interaction at the level of the single teacher school, in the presence of the children and the villagers has given a lot of weight to the programme and is contributing to instil further confidence in the teacher as well as the resource person in using the kit in a proficient manner.'

Our ITDA experience in scaling up the multi-grade methodology remains vital to this day, for it helped us devise essential apparatus for scaling up other initiative. The experience in teaching students and training teachers that first began in the 16 satellite school complex and was refined in all our subsequent interactions within the country—in Karnataka, UP, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala—has converged in the publication of a nine-volume Multigrade Teachers' Resource Pack. The pack is aimed at teachers; its salient volumes include a training guide for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating multi-grade programmes; a handbook for introducing theatre and craft into the classroom; scripts and audio cassettes for staging stories from the *Panchatantra* in Hindi and Telugu; a planning and achievement tracking diary for teachers. Prepared by this long experience in India we are exploring collaboration with educators in southern Ethiopia in a project aimed at starting multi-grade schools modelled along the Rishi Valley pattern.

Quality in education has many dimensions. The National Policy on Education (NPE), a document published by the Government of India in 1986, underlined one dimension of

quality. It announced that apart from providing universal access to schools for every child up to the age of 14, there ought to be 'a substantial improvement in the quality of learning.' The document fixed upon a contrast with the traditional classroom, dominated by a cane-wielding teacher, where accurate memorisation is the measure of successful learning and teaching, to fill out its understanding of 'substantial improvement in quality.' Learning should take place, the policy advocated, in 'child-centred activity-based classrooms,' where 'children should be allowed to work at their own pace,' and where 'corporal punishment will be firmly excluded.'

Rishi Valley Education Centre has incorporated the above norms in the 16 satellite schools it has established. It has also explored other aspects of a child's learning experience, including the ideal location of schools; schools' relationship to their ecological context; children's interactions within the multi-grade classroom and with the larger community. As a consequence of this exploration we can project additional dimensions, which to some may appear more problematic, of the notion of educational quality.

Basic education or imparting reading and writing skills in a child-friendly environment, we believe, is a necessary but insufficient condition for adjudicating quality. The term is ambiguous; it can be interpreted differently in different contexts, especially in an overpopulated country like India, where education holds out the promise of growth to the organised urban sector, but which also has long established village settlements with their own knowledge systems and traditions that are largely neglected, and where livelihoods count

more than jobs. We don't believe that educational norms implied by the use of the word 'quality' in the title of this essay ought to be viewed exclusively through the framework of job creation, even if science and information technology are added on at higher stages as basic needs of education.

Without in any way casting doubt on the need for a child-friendly educational system, we believe that the 1986 NPE descriptions of quality to be too narrow. We believe that quality in education has to take account of the larger reality of the countryside, where 72.22% or 741.66 million of India's people live. Let us take a look at employment opportunities available in rural India while acknowledging that the prospects of generating significant employment in the urban area for migrating labour are bleak.

A recent review of employment patterns in the rural economy by The Economic Times group draws attention to the sharp increase in rural unemployment rates between 1999 and 2000. The Planning Commission confesses to not understanding 'the reasons for the observed increase in unemployment rates in rural areas...' In the area of agriculture, the same review projects a very low employment elasticity figure (0.10) in relation to GDP for the future, so even with a difficult to achieve target of eight per cent growth, the employment generated would not in any significant way increase the number of jobs in rural India. Nonetheless, the authors, offer the following hope:²

'Given that there is bound to be an increase in the rural labour force at least due to the natural rate of growth

2. 'In Search of Greener Pastures', *Economic Times*, The Knowledge Series: Rural Economy, 2002-3, p. 127.

of rural population, there is enough reason to worry about where all these people will find jobs in the future. Elegant economic models of employment in developing countries have long back made clear that creation of employment opportunities in the urban sector is no solution to the rural unemployment problem and in fact, only ends up accentuating it. The only other alternative, then, is in the creation of non-farm work opportunities within the rural sector itself (that is, in the rural non-farm sector or RNFS) – *a shift that comes with a bag load of advantages*, as far as absorption of surplus labour from agriculture is concerned (emphasis ours).

ment. Furthermore, CPR income accounts for a conservative estimate of 14 to 23 per cent of house-hold income. More importantly, CPR income helps to reduce the extent of rural income inequalities.³

Inspired by Jodha's work, we conceive of all our schools as ecological schools, designed to provide a green public spaces for the village. They are planted with fruit trees and medicinal plants; our hope is that the grounds of the schools, which are terraced to conserve water and planted with shrubs and trees, will meet part of the food and fodder needs of the village, and provide space for a variety of plant species.

The rural non-farm sector covers a whole spectrum of activities, from gathering forest products to handloom weaving. Unable to look upon these occupations in a creative spirit, traditional livelihoods hold little appeal for the educated young men and women from our villages. The present educational system bears some responsibility for alienating rural youth from their backgrounds, so that instead of imaginative engagement with their community's needs they turn to gambling and liquor, and in more impoverished states, to violence.

Those of us who chase a fuller conception of quality in education have learnt a lot from a celebrated essay by Narpat Jodha, where he chronicles on the basis of data collected from 80 villages in 21 dry districts, how common property resources contribute to improving marginalized lives in the countryside. His evidence shows that:

'The rural poor receive the bulk of their fuel supplies and fodder from CPRs [Common Property Resources]. CPR's product collection is an important source of employment and income, especially in times of lean employ-

Our search for quality at Rishi Valley can at best provide a first glimpse of where to begin if the culture of village life is to be revitalised. Unless those who set educational policy in India develop a more complete sense of what their country is, and design an educational system in response to the reality of their country, a large proportion of its citizens will be forced to lead increasingly marginalized lives. If one of the primary aims of a modern educational system is to equip students with skills required by the job market, we can equally take lifting communities out of the cycle of 'poverty, environmental degradation and the inability of communities to live with one another'⁴ as an inspiration for educating students. In that way we will be nourishing the Indian earth and the communities it sustains. A comprehensive definition of quality in education will only then emerge.

3. *Life on the Edge: Sustaining Agriculture and Community Resources in Fragile Environments*. Oxford, New Delhi, 2001, p. 130.

4. The phrase is Partha Dasgupta's from his Foreword to Jodha's *Life on the Edge*. Ibid.

The learning guarantee programme

S. GIRIDHAR

IT is late night on Saturday, 14 February, and I have just returned after a week in Bellary and Gulbarga. My mind is full of vivid images of unsung heroes and untold stories from some of north-east Karnataka's most inspirational schools; the pride and joy on the faces of the teachers as 40 outstanding schools that met the criteria defined by the Learning Guarantee Programme are feted and honoured by Azim Premji and Karnataka's Education Minister, Chandrasekhar, at the learning guarantee award function.

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The hall is overflowing with children, head teachers, teachers and members of the school monitoring committees from all parts of north-east Karnataka. The thrill of being winners was all pervasive. And though the winning schools constitute a small minority, there seemed to be a determination as well as optimism among the schools that did not qualify to win next year. Each of the 896 schools that opted for evaluation in the programme in 2003 will be given a detailed analysis of their school's evaluation so as to use this feedback to develop their own action plans.

The Azim Premji Foundation, operational since 2001, implements programmes that are focused towards

improving the quality of learning in government schools. The foundation's approach is to work in partnership with the government; it has a formal memorandum of understanding with the Government of Karnataka to work together for universalization of elementary education. The foundation chose to concentrate on north-east Karnataka because this area has pronounced adverse conditions. More than 48% of Karnataka's out of school children are from the seven districts of this region and, on every conceivable index of education and economy, this region is clearly disadvantaged.

Data from the state educational census conducted in 2002 showed that 3.19 lakh out of the 6.66 lakh out of school children in Karnataka come from the north eastern districts of the state. The districts with the largest 'out-of-school' population of children in the age group of six to 14 are Yadgir (22.3%), Koppal (16.31%) and Raichur (15.92%).

The literacy rate in this area is 55.78% compared to state average of 67% and national average of 65%. The dropout rate is 17% compared to the state average of 13% and the repetition rate is 6.38 compared to state average of 4.50. The region has a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:46 compared to state average of 1:36.

The poor situation extends to sectors other than education. Child health and nutrition indicators point to higher levels of infant mortality and morbidity and malnutrition than in other parts of the state. Chronically drought prone, this area provides little scope for continuous year-round employment.

During the course of its work the foundation saw that despite the tough conditions in most of the habitations in north-east Karnataka there were still some schools which stood out

from the rest – where there was high enrolment, regular attendance and high learning levels.

The Learning Guarantee Programme was designed to identify schools that are achieving expected learning competencies for all their children, reward and recognize them, identify factors that enable these schools to perform beyond constraints and communicate their best practices and motivate all the other schools to emulate them.

Like all programmes of the Azim Premji Foundation, this too is a joint initiative in partnership with the government. The programme is designed to run through a three year period of evaluating schools in 2003, '04 and '05. Launched in November 2002 in all the districts of north-east Karnataka (Bellary, Bijapur, Bagalkot, Raichur, Bidar, Gulbarga, Yadgir and Koppal), the programme was communicated personally to each of the 9270 primary and higher primary schools in the region, offering them not only the choice of participation but also the year in which they wished to be evaluated. The criteria for evaluation of schools were enrolment, attendance and learning outcomes of their children.

Some of the significant aspects of the programme are:

- * Participation is voluntary and open to all primary and upper primary schools. There is no screening process except that the schools have to complete all aspects of the application.
- * Participating schools have the freedom to choose the year when they wish to be evaluated.
- * Schools can decide what they want to do with the award money. They indicate this on the application form.
- * Finally, the evaluation of the schools provides an opportunity for teachers and the educational system to under-

stand the status of individual schools. This could feed into plans for strengthening individual schools/clusters of schools.

Given the focus on voluntary participation of schools, it was decided to launch the programme with emphasis on advocacy and communication. First, to build awareness about learning outcomes and to mobilize a broad base of popular support for the programme; second, to reach out to every school in the region to solicit its participation. A significant component of this communication exercise was the personal communication to each of the 9270 schools in north-east Karnataka, appealing to the pride and competitive spirit of the habitation and the school. Jingles on the radio and announcements in newspapers reiterated the message so that schools and communities were motivated to come forward and offer themselves for evaluation.

The objectives and goals of the programme were introduced to the educational officials (DDPIs, BEOs and CRCs) in all the eight districts through a series of district level meetings where representatives of teachers unions, headmasters and other local leaders were also invited.

By December 2002, each of the 9270 schools in the region had received the programme communication and application forms. An overwhelming 70% of schools, i.e. 6484 schools sent a request for the prospectus. This enthusiastic response showed that schools and teachers were keen to look at learning outcomes, the awards offered making it all the more attractive. Perhaps the fact that there would be no screening and that participation was not contingent on the status of current learning levels may also have spurred such a response.

The 6484 schools were given detailed application forms and pros-

pectus. The participating schools exercised their option of choosing the year that they wished to be evaluated: 2003, 2004 and 2005. The cut-off date for participation was extended to end March 2003 by the foundation. 1,888 schools completed the process and qualified as participants. Of these, 896 schools offered themselves for assessment in 2003.

In the application form, the school was required to provide the following information:

- * Medium of instruction, number of classes in the school, number of classrooms and number of teachers.
- * Enrolment and attendance data for children from classes 1-7 in the school.
- * Data on number of children in the 6-11 age group in the habitation, number enrolled and number of children who were out of school as per the child Census of Karnataka 2002.
- * Details of the school examination results.
- * The results of a baseline study done by conducting a test for classes 2 to 5 based on model test papers prepared by the foundation. One purpose of the model test is give the school an idea of the format of external evaluation and more importantly, to make a self assessment of learning achievement.
- * Requirements of the school on which the award money, if received, would be spent.
- * Year/s in which the schools would like to be evaluated under the programme.

Despite the well thought out steps of reaching out to every school and responding to requests by posting the prospectus, there were still some gaps evident during the field visits and field interactions. Some schools did not receive the applications; others felt that they did not receive any help in completing the application process. In some cases schools that had filled

up the prospectus did not receive any confirmation that they were in the programme. In one school the teachers feared that since the project was for three years they would not be able to get a transfer. In another, the teachers feared that the evaluation would be used to penalize schools or individual teachers. By and large, however, the participating schools seemed excited about to being evaluated.

After the initial workshops and meetings with the education functionaries in November 2002 to introduce the programme, no clear follow-up role for the cluster resource coordinators, block resource persons and block education officers was defined. This shortcoming, sharply brought out in interactions with the block education officers in June 2003, was soon rectified by involving education functionaries in the smooth conduct and logistics of school evaluation, with responsibility assigned to ensure that schools knew their scheduled week for evaluation, and communicating the teacher awards and giving certificates of appreciation to the participating schools to keep their morale high.

The Commissioner for Public Instruction, Government of Karnataka was involved throughout; every communication to the school was signed by him. Similarly, the DSETR and the DIETs helped the foundation in the selection and training of evaluators.

The next stage involved the preparation and unrolling of a massive evaluation exercise: 896 schools in three months, July to September 2003. This called for detailed and meticulous planning, scheduling, logistics, selecting a large but high quality team of evaluators, their training, close supervision to ensure adherence to quality and, finally, professional data entry and analysis.

- 1) A team of 584 evaluators (all of them graduates, many with a MSW or B.Ed degree additionally) formed 146 teams. Each school evaluation took an average of five days. The school evaluation was led by a field project leader who had a team of 37 area coordinators positioned in 37 taluk headquarters to supervise the evaluation teams.
- 2) The 584 evaluators were selected in June 2003 through a process of pre-

Evaluation criteria

- 100% enrolment of all children in the habitation in the ages 6 to 11, as per the child census survey 2002 must be enrolled in school);
- 90% of all children enrolled in Class 1 to 5 must attend school on at least 70% of the school working days during the academic year;
- learning achievement of children:
 - * Category A – 80% of all children enrolled in classes 2, 3, 4, 5 should have attained 90% of the prescribed competencies for class 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. This entitles the school to an award of Rs 20,000.
 - * Category B – 70% of all children enrolled in classes 2, 3, 4, 5 should have attained 90% of the prescribed competencies for class 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. This entitles the school to an award of Rs 10,000.
 - * Category C – 60% of all children enrolled in classes 2, 3, 4, 5 should have attained 90% of the prescribed competencies for class 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. This entitles the school to an award of Rs 5,000.

liminary screening of the applications and bio-data, written test, and interview with a panel consisting of designated officers of DSERT, Karnataka and Azim Premji Foundation.

3) The foundation trained the evaluators in a five day residential programme and evaluation team leaders were selected on the basis of their aptitude.

4) The evaluation team members were trained in appropriate child friendly methods to conduct these tests. A certificate of satisfactory completion of training was a pre-requisite for qualifying as a member of the team.

5) A evaluation process manual was prepared (before the training programme for evaluators) following a number of pilot tests and dry runs and after consultations with Six Sigma quality experts. Professor Nayana Tara of IIM Bangalore provided additional inputs and vetted the manual.

6) The foundation scheduled the 896 school evaluations and informed each of the schools being assessed in writing, the dates of their evaluation at least 14 days in advance. These letters were signed by the Commissioner for Public Instruction, underscoring that this programme was as much of the Government of Karnataka as of the foundation.

7) Each school evaluation by the four member team took five working days – three days for testing every child (oral and written tests) in language and mathematics, the other two days to collect, verify and record data on the school's enrolment and attendance records.

8) The foundation used different sets of question papers for each week of the evaluation process.

9) The data was cross-checked and verified at various stages: at the school by the team leader, at the block headquarters by the area coordinator and at the foundation in Bangalore before data entry and computer processing of

results. Surprise checks during evaluation and formal fortnightly review of the data collected was part of the quality assurance process.

10) The results were presented to a committee consisting of the CEO, Azim Premji Foundation, the Commissioner of Public Instruction, Department of Public Instruction, Government of Karnataka, Director, DSERT Karnataka and Nayana Tara of IIM Bangalore for approval.

The Results in a nutshell:

1. 20% of the government primary and higher primary (1888 of 9270) schools in north-east Karnataka are voluntarily participating in the program over the three years.

2. 896 schools (50% of the participating schools) chose to be evaluated in 2003.

3. 40 schools have won the Learning Guarantee Programme Award for 2003.

4. There are 12 winning schools in category A (Rs 20000); 14 in category B (Rs 10000) and 14 in category C (Rs 5000).

5. Among the 40 winning schools, 465 girls and 446 boys (12% of total number of participants) demonstrated attainment of 100% competencies in maths and language.

6. Enrolment and attendance in all the schools evaluated were uniformly high. 53% of the schools met the enrolment criteria and 47% met the attendance criteria. The key differentiator was 'learning levels'. Only 7.3% schools could meet the criteria of learning achievement.

7. The average pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) in the winning schools is 37 against the north-east Karnataka average of 43.

8. The average school strength in the winning schools (class I to V) is 159 as compared to the north-east Karnataka average of 185.

9. Only about 5% (40 out of 896 evaluated) primary schools ensure learning

competencies for majority of children in the school.

Will the manpower, time and exhaustiveness of the current model of evaluation be a limiting factor to the speedy expansion of the programme? Afterall, one of the objectives of a successful experiment is that it should be replicated. If so, what could be the desirable modifications?

One option is to only evaluate learning achievement of children and not enrolment and attendance. Since the first year of evaluation shows that most schools are either meeting or close to meeting the enrolment and attendance criteria, why not just test for learning? This approach would save nearly 40% in terms of time and costs.

Additionally, some have suggested that a sample of children be evaluated instead of testing every child. This would reduce testing time by nearly 50% and if done scientifically the results would be absolutely reliable. However, there are some points to bear in mind. The children in the participating schools are eager; there are awards for outstanding performances by individual children and sampling would deny an opportunity to all. Community members may feel that their child has lost an opportunity to be assessed if he or she is not in the sample. One unique feature of the learning guarantee programme is that unlike most other programmes which give us empirical evidence of learning levels based on samples, here *every child* is tested.

Another issue for reflection is the nature of the programme, conceived as an outcome based exercise to evaluate schools on a defined criteria. This school of thought believes that the purpose of this programme – to spontaneously spur all schools to strive for quality – is only to hold a mirror of cur-

rent achievement to the schools, the only way it can spread across more states in the country. But is it enough to just evaluate and inform schools with an analysis of their current learning levels and pinpoint the areas for improvement? Should the programme not involve itself with schools to help them improve.

What should be the next phase and potential for expansion? 1500 schools have offered themselves for evaluation in 2004. This time, the foundation must ensure early involvement of the government's block education officers with well-defined roles and a greater sense of ownership. There is also a plan to assess children on all-round development parameters (even though the school will still be rated on the learning achievements as evaluated through competency based testing) to provide qualitative information on the process of learning and overall development, in addition to empirical testing for outcomes. The challenge will be to design appropriate measurement tools.

A study to identify key differences between schools that participated and those who did not has been undertaken by Princeton University. Its findings are expected to be released by March 2004. Dr. Jalaluddin and his organization, NEEV, are conducting case studies of the processes in successful schools as part of the overall aim to gain greater insight and understanding.

The enormous wealth of data that has been collected on the current learning levels offers a unique basis for schools to implement their own home-grown improvement programmes. The foundation will inform every school about its class wise, gender wise performance, identify critical areas and competencies where the learning is not demonstrated so that

action plans can be prepared on the basis of sharp granular data.

The programme's ability to get spontaneous and voluntary participation from schools could drive others to aspire for quality and thus stand up and be accountable. More schools may make light of constraints in aiming to be successful. This writer, during his visit to Bellary, ran into a school inspector who said that she is moving away from the routine practice of inspection to a greater emphasis on interacting with children to assess their learning levels and observing and contributing to the teaching learning classroom processes. Some states have expressed interest in the Learning Guarantee Programme. The fact that the foundation has documented every aspect of this programme from the concept stage, recording both what went well and things that did not, may give it the ability to provide improved and custom built options to these states.

Finally, in this model of external evaluation, integrity is vital. In adopting such a model it would be imperative that the evaluating agency's credibility and integrity in the public perception be established beyond doubt and reproach.

The foundation is justifiably cautious as the programme has completed only the first year of evaluation. As it grows and spreads, will schools transcend from a limited vision of qualifying for the learning guarantee awards to providing a more wholesome and holistic education? Will experts who examine this model find a golden mean for the evaluation process to reduce the costs of evaluation? These are areas where the programme needs regular review to help maintain its ideals and objectives of learning guarantee while maximizing its potential for expansion beyond Karnataka.

Learning to read

RUKMINI BANERJI, MADHAV CHAVAN
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It is December 13. A sunny cold day on a terrace in Mustafabad in northeast Delhi. Eleven year old Gulistan is trying to read. Her eyes are downcast and her voice is very low as she mumbles and tries to decipher letters and words. She does not go to school. Her friend, Asma is a serious looking girl. She looks older than Gulistan. She too tries to read in a very soft voice. Very few words are audible: 'chat...ghar...par.' Both these children attend a Pratham bridge course. Neither can read.

LEARNING to read is the first and most essential step for education. Without being able to read a child cannot progress further in any school or educational programme.

According to the government, of the approximately 200 million children in the age 6 to 14 in the country, about 35 million children are out of school (National Plan of Action: India 2003). With continuing efforts at the central, state and local levels, the push towards universalization of primary education is intensifying. Nevertheless, despite more and more children coming to school and high and increasing

enrolment rates, dropout from primary schools remains alarmingly high. Official government figures state that on average, of every 10 children who enter formal school in class I, only six complete the primary school stage (UNDP 2000).

Dropout from primary school happens for a variety of reasons. One major reason is low learning levels. Studies done in DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) show that poor academic achievement is endemic to the Indian primary education system. Available estimates of children who are in school indicate that only 30% can read stories fluently (Pratham Rapid Assessment 2003.)

Children begin to lag behind academically from the early grades and then eventually drop out of school by the end of or during the primary stage. On the one hand, many children do not make adequate progress in the early grades, and on the other, the content and pace of the curriculum (as

mandated by the state government) in class III and IV accelerates rapidly, making 'catching up' difficult. It is not unusual to have large numbers of children complete the primary school stage in class IV or V without being able to read or write fluently or do simple arithmetic computations.

We insufficiently realise that many children, especially from economically disadvantaged families and communities, are first generation learners. The adults in the household are often uneducated. There is not enough support, space, opportunity, time, interest or inputs at home for the child's learning to be supported and strengthened so that he/she can be 'successful' in the formal school system.

On the school side, the Indian primary education system is based on several key assumptions: (i) Children enter the formal school system in class I. (ii) Children attend school regularly and continuously. (iii) Children in each grade master the content and competencies laid down for that grade level by the state government curriculum (as represented by the textbook).

For many Indian children, these assumptions are misplaced. Whether government or private, school systems in India do not have any inbuilt mechanisms to provide supplemental help to children who progress at a slower pace than mandated by the state curriculum. Elite and middle class parents organize this extra help to strengthen children's learning through tuition and other classes. Poor parents cannot afford this extra supplement. Thus, if children begin to fall behind in the early grades, there is no provision within the school system to help them. As the national push to universalize primary education gathers steam, it is likely that the effort will bring more children into the school system who will need sustained effort and resources

and 'accelerated learning' techniques to help them 'catch up', stay in school and succeed.

The frustrations: Pratham's experiments with accelerated learning grew out of frustration with our own work.¹ There were at least four sources of frustration:

* Pace of learning gains and guaranteed results. We had been working mainly with two types of children – those currently not in school (never been to school or dropouts) and those who are currently in school but are well behind where they should be according to their age and grade in terms of learning. In order to have a reasonable chance to move forward in the education system, both kinds of children need to 'accelerate' to catch up. Children in Pratham programmes were making progress, but their learning gains were neither dramatic nor predictable.

* Effective use of available time. We were aware that we were not using available time in the most effective way. The school calendar as well as the calendar followed by families and communities has many discontinuities because of festivals and holidays.² Available chunks of time for teaching are in the July-September period and then again in the December to February period just before school exams. While children in Pratham

1. Pratham is a citizen's initiative that is directly working for the universalization of primary education in 30 cities and 9 rural districts in nine states. Through our educational activities, we are in daily touch with over 200,000 children around the country. We believe that every child should be in school and learning well. To achieve this we work closely with government schools, and with individuals and institutions in every city. In many cities, Pratham initiatives are registered as independent public charitable trusts. Funds are received from a variety of sources including the corporate sector, government and individuals. (visit www.pratham.org for more information).

programmes were learning, the gains were often lost between teaching periods.

* Transfer of teaching-learning know-how. Pratham instructors are local young people – often products of the schools that they are trying to strengthen. We were concerned about transmission loss in the process of transfer during training. Although Pratham's training model emphasizes on-the-job help through trainer-monitors, the work in slums, villages and even schools, of monitoring and supervision is limited by the diffuse nature of the programme activities. This puts severe constraints on ensuring that all that is delivered in training is absorbed and used on the ground. Often instructors relapse into using old methods in a crude way.

* Not enough effect on government systems, especially on teaching learning processes and outcomes. Pratham efforts are large scale, unusual among NGOs. However, the 220,000 children served by Pratham in 2002-03 is a very small number relative to the size of the national problem. Pratham has always aspired to catalyze larger efforts and to impact the governmental system through a demonstration effect of cost-effective solutions. These efforts have been partially successful. The terminology of 'remedial education' and short term 'bridge classes' has become a part of SSA documents and education policy literature in general. It is also true that Pratham has been able to create part-

2. The school calendar in most parts of India has frequent interruptions thanks either to festivals or seasons. For example, the school year begins in June-July in many parts of the country. June-July-August in much of India is hit by monsoons. By September the festival season begins – Janmashtami, Ganapati, Dushera/Navratri, Diwali, Ramzan – and it stretches into November in some years. In the last two years, government schools in North India have often been shut for several weeks due to the extreme cold in December and January. School examinations are in March.

nerships with various governments to deliver these services. But, in the past, the burden of delivery has fallen on Pratham while the government remained a willing but passive partner.

We were aware that acceleration in learning was critical for children's further progress. Learning had to be strong and durable, and achieved with considerable predictability and at a fast pace even under constraints of poorly educated human resources available in slum communities. If this could be demonstrated, the impact making ability of Pratham would multiply many-fold given our presence on a relatively large scale in most major cities of India.

The experiments: For the first few years in Pratham (1994 to 1998) we tried methods and materials used by school systems. However, as our impatience and frustration grew, we began to experiment with different approaches in teaching and learning.³ Three years ago in Maharashtra we decided to start with a 'story' as a text for learning to read. A small storybook based on Shivaji was created. Shivaji's childhood is a part of the state government's history textbook for class III. Tales about him are recounted in every Maharashtrian household.

The method used was the same as in the textbook except that we started with a story and did not worry about the sequence in which the consonants or vowel signs came. We did not limit the number of consonants and vowel signs to be taught in the beginning. But, each page of the story actually involved an increasing number of alphabets and *matras*.

This method generated a lot of new interest among teachers. But it needed a lot of practice with work-

sheets. The 10 page Shivaji storybook was accompanied by a 60 page workbook. The method resulted in good reading-writing achievement in four months. This was visible in the pilot area – Ralegan block of Yavatmal district in Maharashtra. But it still needed considerable training. The Pratham Gujarat group adapted the 'Shivaji' primer method and accompanying worksheets to fit the Gujarati context. There we used the story of the movie Lagaan, which is set in Kutch, a part of Gujarat affected by the massive earthquake in 2001.

Both these attempts led to more assured results. However, replication required a lot of effort and there was no 'overnight' visible change. Though an improvement over the past, it was not yet the 'magic wand' that we wanted.

In late 2001, in North India, we used the 'word approach'. Starting with simple words without matras, children moved forward by recognizing alphabets and then mixing-matching. Gradually, matras were introduced. Old words, new words and progressively variety of simple sentences using familiar and unfamiliar alphabets and words were used. Three months after this method was adopted, a city-wide assessment of reading skills was conducted. Close to 1500 children were tested in a single day, one by one. Two important observations were made that day:

i) Children who read the easy paragraph with stopping and struggling felt they could not handle the more difficult paragraph. Many claimed that they had not yet learnt words with matras. Yet when coaxed to read the story they were able to navigate much of the text, although with difficulty. This surprised us and the children. They looked around, sometimes shyly and occasionally triumphantly.

ii) Children could propel themselves through the stories even if they did not read fluently or know all the matras. The clues for reading were embedded in the context, and the meaning and narrative created the desire to read. Once children started on a story it was often difficult to get them to stop.

From this exercise we learnt that we were holding children back by giving them a text that was easy, when in fact left on their own with some encouragement, they were trying a more difficult text if they thought that it was worth reading. It seemed clear that we needed a more hands-off method which exposed children to different kinds of text. We could also see that children actively constructed meaning as they attempted to read; their reading effort was helped by comprehension.

In September 2002, Professor Jalaluddin, an acknowledged expert in literacy, described his use of the traditional chart of the *barakhadi* as a means of coding and decoding words. He said that he had success with school-going children when taught by properly trained instructors who worked in a systematic way. His work showed that children could read and write in a matter of three months using his method. This had been tried and tested in several hundred schools of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

We began to think that if we focused solely on reading as an independent activity, leaving aside writing for now, there could perhaps be more rapid progress. Our interactions with children suggested that when they are engaged in a variety of activities that have implicit interconnections, they make the connections and these snowball into a larger skill. A new technique was evolved using the integrated approach to learning. Treat it like a game, where you begin to play from the first

3. There are similar experiments in maths. But for the purposes of this paper, the focus is entirely on language and reading.

day and learn the rules of the game later.

The first positive feedback was when Zubeida, a young Pratham trainer in Delhi, reported that out of 108 children who could not read, 32% started reading in a month when she followed the integrated method. But neither the experiment nor the data was conclusive. Nevertheless, in the monthly North India group meeting, various team leaders were asked to further experiment with the technique. A month later, in October, the Patna group came back excitedly talking about children learning to read rapidly. Another young lady, Sujata, who had experimented said, 'I am not sure how, but we did all these activities and the children seemed to "pluck" something out of the air, and they had learnt!' Sunita's words were probably the most perfect observation about how children were learning.

In early December 2002, we decided to refine the technique and simultaneously create a video-record of the 'before' and 'after' in a span of one month. The intense process involved about 21 days of actual class time. The results of this experiment in the Mustafabad area of East Delhi can be seen in the film ...*And Now I Can Read*.⁴ The experiment was validated by a market research agency. There were many shortcomings, which were corrected later, and a cold wave struck Delhi right in the middle of the experiment. Yet, the video record of the progress made by children startled everyone who saw it.

4. There are two films that document the Pratham reading technique and its impact on children. '...Now I Can Read' is a film about out of school children in Mustafabad in north-east Delhi who are learning to read. 'The Mokhada Tale', a film shot in Mokhada block of Thane district in Maharashtra, documents the progress of school-going children learning to read.

Children starting at different levels of reading ability had progressed to different but higher levels of reading ability in 21 days. Those who did not even know the alphabets were reading sentences haltingly and those who could read words only with difficulty but could not read sentences fluently graduated to good reading. And they were very confident and smiling.

Now it is January 16. The terrace in Mustafabad is still sunny but colder. Gulistan is shy and still reads softly but her head is held higher and there is a confidence in her voice. She reads with her finger on the page, 'ghar...aap...atta hai. Hath gha...dha...kar khana khata hai.' There are a few mistakes in her reading but she can move through the paragraph easily. Asma is actually smiling as she reads fluently today: 'Yahan aam ka ped hai. Kuch aam bada hai. Kuch aam chota hai.' She puts down the paper and smiles triumphantly once again.

The progress in the 21 day period was a strong indication of the kind of rapid pace that was possible. We have now come to the conclusion that an average child being taught by an average teacher would take no more than 4-6 weeks to become fluent in reading. At the same time, children begin to write by themselves, expressing their thoughts in a crude way.

We experimented purely on the basis of what we observed among children. We saw that children learn to play the entire game and not its parts and we translated this observation into the 'integrated' learning exercise of saying, doing, reading, and writing.

The technique: To start off, each child, one by one, is asked to read. The assessment is very simple. The child is shown an easy paragraph with four simple sentences.⁵ If the child has difficulty in reading this paragraph, he is shown a set of common words and asked to read any four or five words

of his choice. If he cannot manage words, then he is shown a set of letters and asked to read any of his choice. The categorization of children's current level follows logically: if the child can read the paragraph easily, he is termed as a 'paragraph' child. He is then shown a short one-page story. If he can navigate the story with ease and fluency then he is categorized as a 'story' level child. Those who can cope only up to word level are called 'word' level children. The 'letter' and 'nothing' categories follow respectively.

The assessment tools and process are simple and easy to administer. The distribution of children across the different categories is also easy to understand. Before starting to work with a group of children, it is imperative that the instructor (whether a local volunteer or a qualified teacher) sits with each child alone for a few minutes and urges the child to read. The one-on-one interaction between the teacher and individual children is critical: once the instructor has heard every child read or try to read, she is aware of who is stumbling at which stage and why.

Four main activities are conducted daily. The first is reading stories aloud (with finger pointing at words as story is read aloud). Next, are exercises with the barakhadi chart (this is a chart with vowels and consonant sounds in a grid form). The third activity involves playing word games with similar sounding words. The last activity is called 'kuch bhi bolo, kuch bhi likho' (talk about something, write about something). It is designed to make children think on their own, develop the confidence to express their thoughts orally in class

5. For example: *Mane halwa banaya. Sonune khaya. Monune bhi khaya. Badamaja aaya.*

and attempt to put down their own thoughts on paper.

Through all of this, the instructor has three major tasks: first, to set herself up as the role model for reading. Her clear pronunciation, diction and reading style, facilitate and encourage children to read like her. Second, she has to focus on children who are struggling to make progress, tailor activities to help them move ahead. Third, she has to encourage and coax children to read, write and think on their own, only guiding and nudging when needed.

TABLE I
Samples of Reading Data From Around the Country
Pratham and Non-Pratham Programmes

	Reading levels (Pratham programmes)	Delhi MCD schools		Gujarat summer camps	
		Pratham balsakhis Duration: 1 month April 2003		Pratham balsakhis Duration: 2 months April-May 2003	
		% of children		% of children	
		Baseline	Final	Baseline	Final
Readers	Story Easy para	21	57	5 9	34 22
	Word	22	20	17	21
Non-readers	Letter Nothing	33 24	16 7	30 40	18 5
	Total children	15901	15138	6182	5819

The time taken for these exercises is an hour and a half daily, though the division of time across different activities varies. In the early days, more time may be spent on word exercises and barakhadi activities. By day 15, children may spend more time reading and writing on their own.

The results: Since January 2003, more than 250000 children in Pratham programmes have learnt to read using this method. In addition, there are children in government schools who have learned using the same approach. The technique has been tried in different

parts of India with different languages and in different organizational settings.

The accompanying Table I gives a glimpse of the effectiveness of the accelerated reading programme.

The spread: The Pratham network of direct teaching-learning programmes is spread over 30 cities and nine rural districts in the country. By January 2003, the basic elements of the approach and technique were in place. Immediate experimentation and piloting began across the network. All key people in leadership positions, trainer-monitors and instructors became engaged in understanding how acceleration in learning could be generated and sustained. Materials were quickly developed and tested in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada. Each region learnt from others' experiences in teaching-learning, assessment, training and communication, and organizational strategies.

Pratham's in-school remedial programmes as well as community-based learning support initiatives began to use this accelerated reading method with encouraging results. Bridge courses, where the need for acceleration is most acute, switched to

	Reading levels (Others implementing)	Bangalore summer camps		Jodhpur community programme		Mokhada-Igatpuri (Maharashtra 2 rural blocks)		Urban Assam SSA		Lucknow: learning guarantee schools	
		Pratham volunteers Duration: 2 months April-June 2003		Pratham Duration: 2 months Aug-Oct 2003		Feb-April 2003 Govt. teachers Duration: 2 months		July-Aug 2003 NGOs + Govt Duration: 6 weeks		Pratham balsakhis Duration: 3 months Oct 2003-Jan 2004	
		% of children		% of children		% of children		% of children		% of children	
		Baseline	Final	Baseline	Final	Baseline	Final	Baseline	Final	Baseline	Final
Readers	Story Easy para	8	54	1 12	39 25	50	88	0 0	26 19	0 13	75 16
	Word	37	37	20	23	26	12	30	23	13	8
Non-readers	Letter Nothing	28 27	7 2	31 35	13 0	16 8	0 0	32 30	24 7	35 38	1 0
	Total children	6493	6493	2245	2173	17064	20564	3964	3743	1341	1281

using the new innovation. By mid-May, all Pratham summer camps in Gujarat, Bangalore and North India were entirely focused on improving children's reading. Taking stock in July, we found that over 150,000 children had participated in what was being called the 'Read India' programme since January.

The innovation changed every aspect of our functioning. Training took on a different form: all Pratham people – trainers, administrators and instructors took up teaching-learning. The new leadership team consisted of those who had success with children and were also good communicators. Clear and simple communication (orientation and regular feedback) became the hallmark of transferring the know-how to others.

A basic maxim in Pratham now is that nobody can train anybody else unless they have successfully enabled at least 25 children to read. Assessment has above all increasingly become central in understanding and shaping our own work at every level. But, the need for and ability to run time-bound and outcome oriented programmes is much higher today.

The catalytic effect: The new innovation accelerated children's reading. It sharpened our effectiveness in enabling children to learn quickly and improved capacities in our direct programmes. Even more importantly it opened up new opportunities for influence and collaboration. Among our founding principles is that Pratham has to be a catalyst in strengthening and improving the existing school system.

6. The simple assessment tool used in the reading programme helped to concretely diagnose the problem in schools. The simplicity of the tool and categories focused everyone's attention on the problem on hand and helped to motivate people to quickly find a solution using the proposed reading package.

Since 1994, we had worked alongside with the government and often within the school system itself in many cities. On different issues, we had influenced policy at the national, state and local levels. However, in terms of changing the teaching-learning practices in school, our role was limited to our own direct delivery systems.

With the accelerated reading programme, new horizons opened up. The best example of Pratham's catalytic effect is from Maharashtra. Since 2002, there have been Pratham direct programmes in 10 cities around Maharashtra (not including Pune and Mumbai). In every city Pratham teams were working directly with 1000 to 2000 children. Within Pratham, this 10 city programme was seen as a demonstration model – where district officials and schools could see for themselves how time-bound and outcome oriented programmes could be run at a local level by community volunteers. In some cases, these programmes were run in the schools and in others in the community. In all cases, external agencies, institutions and individuals were invited to independently assess and 'validate' results generated by the Pratham teams.

In February 2003, Pratham persuaded the Maharashtra government to try the reading technique with the government school teachers. Two backward tribal blocks (Mokhada in Thane and Igatpuri in Nasik) were chosen for pilots. In both blocks, only 50% of children in government schools from class II to V could read stories.⁶ The rest of the children were the focus of the reading programme. As the first step, the 'kendra pramukhs' (cluster resource centre coordinators) met and the reading technique was explained. The CRCs were encouraged to try the technique in their own classes in their own school. In ten days, having tried

the technique, they met again. Their experiences had been very encouraging and they decided to extend the approach and technique to all the schools under them.

By mid-April, the results were in. Over 85% of children were reading in these schools. Teachers, parents and children were thrilled with the visible and rapid progress. Apart from providing the know-how about the technique and materials, Pratham's contribution to the effort was in the form of two young people for each pilot to move around the block, ensuring that motivation remained high and that the work progressed.

Emboldened by the success of this pilot, we initiated dialogue with all district officials (CEOs of districts, education department officials, zilla parishads) about the potential of such an approach to visibly and quickly change the basic level of learning in zilla parishad (government) schools across the state. It was possible to have every child in Maharashtra reading fluently within the 2003-2004 academic year.

By September 2003, 30 districts in the state had started one pilot block each using the Mokhada-Igatpuri case as an example. By November, district-wide implementation of the reading programme was in place in 17 districts with strong support from teachers, parents, district officials and the panchayati raj system. We are awaiting the final results to see how far 'every child reading' has been achieved in this academic year. Meanwhile, there is a great deal of discussion in zilla parishad schools about basic maths being done in the same 'campaign style' to accelerate a large number of children out of the backlog of low-learning. Simultaneously there is a growing and articulated need from teachers to enable children to write

well and learn about content areas in science, history and geography.⁷

It has taken hardly a year to go from direct demonstration of the technique approach in ten cities in Maharashtra in Pratham's programmes (reaching about 12,000 children), to a two block pilot with government school teachers working with 20,000 children to statewide implementation reaching close to 500,000 children. The pace and scale of the replication is unprecedented. The 'reading revolution' in Maharashtra has been conducted entirely by the government school teachers themselves.⁸

The possibilities: Catalytic work through the government school system in Maharashtra has been very successful. However, the question that arises is: will such an approach work in states like Uttar Pradesh or Bihar?

Looking closely at our experience in Maharashtra and thinking beyond, we are able to focus on a number of core elements that together display a strong potential for bringing about large-scale catalytic change:

* Existing structures and networks: These can be activated to work in a campaign style to bring about a rapid change in reading. In Maharashtra,

with no acute shortage of teachers and with an existing structure (academic support structure through cluster coordinators and decision-making structure through zilla parishads), the government system was the vehicle for catalytic action. In other contexts, different networks can be activated – district and block level colleges, Mahila Samakhya network, cooperatives, panchayats, shikshamitras, NGO networks, teacher's associations, community-based village groups, self-help groups and so on.⁹

* People's initiative, ownership and leadership: In exploring the possibilities of catalytic action and in transferring know-how to others, the issue of ownership and leadership is critical. Even in Maharashtra, we find that different people at different levels took the initiative and provided leadership. In some cases it was the block education officer or the kendra pramukh (cluster coordinator), in other districts it was the CEO or the zilla parishad chairperson. Although it was hard to predict who would come forward, it was absolutely certain that someone would. It is our firm conviction that there exists tremendous initiative among people that comes to the surface when a large-scale movement begins, especially when the move-

ment is open, flexible and simple. This leadership is more powerful because it leads by doing and not by rhetoric.¹⁰

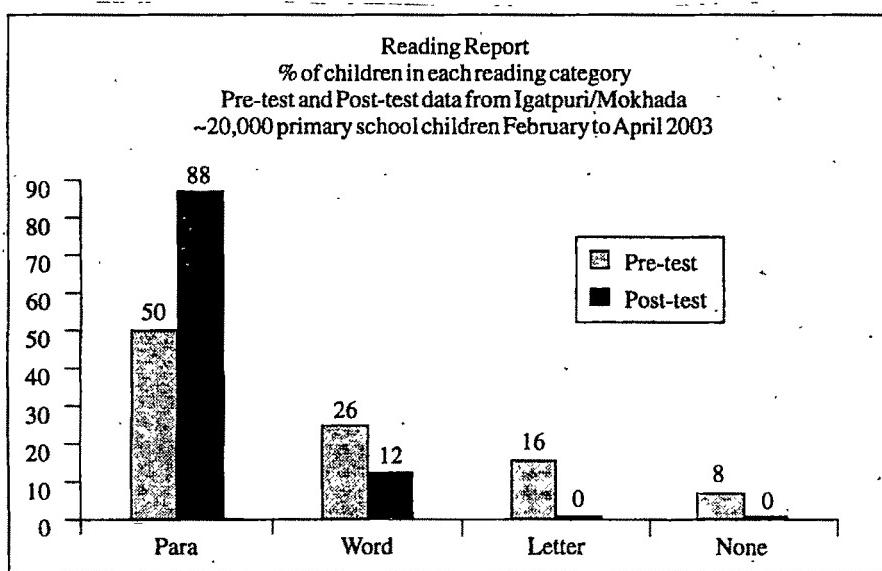
* Faith in people to deliver: Although this factor is hard to quantify, Pratham teams in Maharashtra, at all levels, firmly hold on to the conviction that common people (school teachers in Maharashtra) are the best to improve learning. This was an important factor in maintaining high levels of motivation and contributed significantly to the remarkable results.

Catalytic efforts are being attempted in Gujarat, and in cities of Rajasthan (Jaipur, Jodhpur and Ajmer). In Bihar (Nalanda district) and Uttar Pradesh (Sultanpur district), the ongoing catalytic efforts have involved gram panchayats and local village level leaders in thinking and implementing local solutions for

7. In Maharashtra, at the primary level, a majority of rural children go to zilla parishad schools. There are relatively few private schools. This is a feature worth noting. Children of affluent farmers as well as children of panchayat members are in the local government school. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in cities of Maharashtra or in other parts of the country where there are private schools in rural areas as well.

8. Readiness to focus on learning issues among teachers: Across the state, recent Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan surveys indicate that less than 5% children are out of school. With the vast majority of children in school, the focus has to shift to learning in order to retain children at least through the elementary cycle. In the last 10 years, large scale training of teachers has taken place every year to orient them towards effective teaching. Thus in a sense, the ground was ready to take on learning as an agenda. The introduction of a simple goal in a short time frame to improve reading as a first step was relatively easy to accept.

9. MV Foundation's remarkable work in activating teacher's associations and unions to be a strong voice against child labour is a powerful indicator of the potential to turn existing groups and networks to think and act on new issues. The impressive network of community-based village groups in the Lok Jumbish districts is another possible partner for catalytic action.



strengthening schools and improving children's learning. All these efforts use reading as the first step.

The lessons: Pratham's adventure with reading on a mass-scale is barely a year old. Yet there are many lessons that we have learned. First, we have proved to ourselves that time-bound, outcome-oriented programmes can be run on a mass scale. Second, having done it ourselves, we are more confident of convincing others that this can be done on a national scale. Third and most important, we have seen that a simplicity of approach is crucial. All aspects of the reading campaign are simple—assessment, setting objectives, accepting ownership, planning, technique, communication, training, materials, organizational structure for implementation and replication. Ordinary teachers, ordinary panchayats, ordinary parents and ordinary citizens can understand what to do, how to do it and what is to be achieved. Visible progress is appreciated by all participants and onlookers. Significant progress creates a natural desire for more progress.

The successful catalytic work in Maharashtra, and the attempts in Gujarat and Rajasthan have also convinced us that ordinary people can bring about dramatic change in the learning outcomes in the country. This is not a popular belief especially in the education establishment, even more so when we say that teachers can be strong agents of change. To facilitate this change, a great deal of work needs to be done at the organizational level, in terms of organization of teaching-learning at the school level, organization of academic support systems to the school and community support to

assist and strengthen schools to achieve simple learning goals for all children.

At all levels of educational discourse and debate in the country, whether in national forums or in local meetings, 'quality' and 'learning' need to be demystified. The conceptualization of quality can be comprehensive and learning can be thought of as multi-dimensional. But its achievement must be planned in manageable and achievable steps. Reading is only the first step. A child cannot move ahead without reading fluently. Every child reading, writing and doing basic arithmetic confidently will pave the way for a stronger foundation for more learning.

The way forward: Our adventure with basic reading has led us to think in many new directions. At a micro level, within our own direct demonstration programmes, we are now experimenting with the 'Reading to Learn' phase—how to enable a child to read a passage or a text with comprehension, mark words that she does not understand, ask questions and write well. As a supplement to actual teaching-learning, we believe children should have access to libraries and simple and affordable books in their community to sustain their interest.

At a macro level, whether at the state or national level, we are working hard to make 'Reading India' a reality. 'Reading India' implies that every child in India above the age of seven can read fluently and wants to read more and more. Our direct programmes will remain as demonstration sites. But much of our effort in the coming year will be focused on developing new avenues, mechanisms and partnerships for influencing local communities and school systems to accept ownership of children's learning. Large scale campaigns are needed that come out of local efforts aiming at simple solutions with clear targets and visible outcomes.

10. The large scale involvement of people in the National Literacy Mission of the late 1980s and early 1990s is a good example of people's initiative in recent times.

Rethinking schooling

GURVEEN KAUR

THE campaign for universalisation of primary education has succeeded in getting schooling accepted as a non-negotiable for all children today, including those from underprivileged sections. As universal schooling becomes mandatory, it becomes imperative to spell out why the right to schooling is a non-negotiable, and enquire whether schools deliver what we expect.

Schooling is considered a non-negotiable right because of an assumption that schools educate and by doing so provide equal opportunities for all regardless of class, caste or sex. But, is it true that schools educate? And, more important, what do schools do if they don't educate?

Here one is not talking only about the much criticized and dismal state of government schools but our best schools—private or corporate and public schools. The success of our professionals, particularly the software engineers, doctors, writers, management and financial experts in India and abroad, leads most people to assume that all is well with the Indian education system and any attempt to question or debate the issue is suspect

and/or unnecessarily cynical. But an assessment obsessed system should not be averse to a candid assessment of itself.

For too long we have used the term 'education' in a very general way, to mean very different things to different people. So much so that we can no longer be sure if people are using it to mean even roughly the same thing. Though we feel there is some common ground that permits a conversation, it is fast disappearing. It is important, therefore, that we begin by clearly spelling out what we mean by the term 'education'.

One way of discovering a commonsense understanding of the term is to examine how it is used in ordinary, everyday conversation. It is not uncommon to come across statements like, 'I wouldn't have expected this from an educated person like him' or 'Whenever I see an educated person behaving in an unethical, irresponsible manner or irrational, superstitious manner, I'm still shocked.' All these statements imply a certain notion of an educated person and (the process of) education. I will try and spell out a minimalist, substantive understanding

of education that is contained in everyday talk and is common to what most educationists advocate.

In calling a person educated we make a positive value judgment. There is an expectation that education will improve the person, and that an educated person will behave in a better manner than one who is not educated. There is a sense of being let down, disappointment and dismay if an educated person does not conduct himself in a manner that is rational, morally good and socially responsible.

It is clear that by education is meant all-round development of a person, not merely specialist or professional training. Educationists too stress that education is a holistic process and not only a training of the intellect. It is development of moral, social, aesthetic as well as rational capacity. People might differ on the degree of importance that they place on these various dimensions but most would include all these in their notion of an educated person.

An educated person is not just well-informed (stuffed with facts and figures) or one who has learnt the knack or know-how of doing something. An educated person is not just one who knows what, and how, but also why. While one expects that an educated person has knowledge, one also expects that the person has an understanding of the underlying principles of the physical and social – including political and economic – world. An educated person is someone who has evolved his own mental map according to which he steers his life and interprets all new facts and experiences.

Nor does one expect that an educated person's knowledge or understanding is inert but that it informs his perceptions, worldview and how he conducts his life. If a person realizes

or learns of the importance of truth, goodness, beauty, love, justice and simplicity but shows no commitment to them in the way he lives his life, we cannot help feeling that person is not truly educated. The minimum we expect from an educated person is that s/he thinks in a rational and critical manner and behaves ethically and responsibly.

A person certainly cannot be said to be educated till he has developed his potentialities as per his individual aptitude and acquired a greater understanding of his core self. Not only does the etymological root of the word 'education' point in that direction but most philosophical and religious traditions urge one to 'know thyself'. This would mean acquiring some understanding of what it means to be oneself, clarity regarding one's values, priorities and aim or direction (as distinct from one's socialization or cultural conditioning – though not necessarily in rejection of them). Only then can an educated person be truly called self-determined and be held responsible for his actions.

Education is an attempt to guide and introduce the person to the process and importance of self-realisation. While this could be, and often has been, misused in the past to socialise persons, the concept of education excludes processes such as indoctrination and conditioning. An educated person carries the idea of autonomous and authentic person and *not* one who has been conditioned or indoctrinated. Education is guidance and direction but in a fashion that does not estrange or alienate from oneself but puts one on to the path of meaningful learning and realizing one's true self.

This list of the characteristics of an educated person must surely make us blanch. For we know, even without listing the characteristics, that this

is not our experience of a schooled person. For what typifies a schooled person are a very different set of characteristics. Schooled people are:

(i) Those who have learnt the knack of doing things in an appropriate or expected manner – be it examinations, dressing, behaviour in a social setting, speaking confidently at different occasions, communicating effectively, solving mathematical problems or doing sophisticated, scientific experiments – but their behaviour outside of that particular situation reveals that they rarely understand the underlying issues, concepts or problems. As for appearances, the present day school graduates seem smarter and more sophisticated than their counterparts of earlier generations.

(ii) Despite awareness of different facts, more information and skills, many have often neither internalized nor assimilated them such that they becomes personally meaningful or lead to a coherent overall picture. It is as if they hold all the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle in their hand but are incapable or unwilling to put them together. Unfortunately, even school teachers and curriculum planners seem to be confused and are busy trying to 'raise quality' by ever increasing the quantity of information to be learnt at yet younger ages, without requisite understanding or concern about what can be grasped at what developmental stage/age.

(iii) The schooled people no longer worship at the altar of truth, goodness, justice or – and though they would debate it – love and beauty. More often they worship at the altar of success (meaning money and status), pleasure and convenience. The concept of 'a good life' is no longer measured by commitment to truth, goodness or justice but by access to success, pleasures and convenience – a change that is faithfully reflected in most advertisements today.

(iv) Most schooled people, used to timetables and the bell ringing every 45 minutes, have been conditioned to rarely think in terms of an integrated and meaningful way of spending even a day of their life. Those who have been further schooled realize that attempts to lead an integrated life may only add to the inconsistencies and contradictions that we strain to live through at every moment of our compartmentalized-for-convenience-lifestyle and thus do not even attempt it.

(v) Schooling is not about helping a person discover who he is. From the moment a child enters school, his day is organized for him and he must fall into line. Successful, schooled people are those who have learnt fairly early to fit themselves into the system. Those who tried and could not fit in are termed 'failures' and those who refuse to play the game or submit are the 'dropouts'. Far from making a person clear about their values, priorities or direction, schools today require that people submit themselves to the requirements of the system and take on the values of the system or be streamed/phased out.

(vi) Just as education is viewed positively, so too is schooling. The difference is that education is valued for intrinsic reasons, while schooling is valued for instrumental reasons. People are clear that for all its negatives, it is a priority as it is one's lottery ticket to the goodies of modern life. I deliberately used the word 'lottery ticket' and not 'passport' for even with it, there is uncertainty whether you will get something.

This makes it sufficiently clear that if we accept the earlier listed criteria as the criteria for education and as characterizing a schooled person, then schools do not educate. The disconnect between the first and second list

makes abundantly clear that schooling and education are two very different things. Schooling tells one *what to think* whereas an education teaches one *to think*. One could even say that education is a process of meaningful learning and capacity building whereas schooling seems to have become more an exercise of human resource management.

Having gone thus far, let us pursue this line of enquiry. At this point we can do no better than to turn to Everett Reimer's, *The School is Dead* and Ivan Illich's, *Deschooling Society*. These two books question the very idea of schooling. Both Reimer and Illich point out that schools have taken on new functions like custodial care, role selection and indoctrination and some of these functions sit ill with the task of educating.

While custodial care does not necessarily conflict with the task of education, indoctrination does. An important task of schools today is to mould children into an uncritical acceptance of mainstream values and agenda/policies. At no point is there any attempt to include a discussion of radical alternatives to the dominant norms of society. (Some committed individual teachers may do so, but at their own initiative and risk). However, because some bright students will question or be critical, they are indoctrinated into believing that 'the system cannot be changed' or that 'you cannot reverse the direction of change/progress' and are sought to be tamed by turning their critical energies into plugging the shortcomings of the system rather than questioning it in a radical manner.

What greater proof do we need of schooling as indoctrination than the fact that we have uncritically internalized the idea that only constant competition and examinations provide the

motivation and incentive to learn, to keep us on our mental toes, which is contrary to our experience that we learn best in congenial and supportive situations. Under pressure one only tries to cope by relying on previously acquired skills or trying to not look too bad. It is shocking when people actually ask, 'If it were not for exams how would the teacher know what the child has or has not learnt? And if it were not for marks, how would we know where our child stands?'

It is absurd that one needs to point to their own experience: don't you as parents assess your child without examinations and know where s/he stands, or assess your colleagues and know their strengths and weaknesses without the need for conducting any formal examinations? Any teacher who has taught a child for a while can tell you the real level of the student, down to the spelling errors that s/he is likely to make before even conducting the exam. If we were not so schooled into accepting the logic of competition and examinations we would see people strive for excellence and voluntarily undertake challenging work in a congenial atmosphere without any incentives.

Constant performance assessment creates pressure for glossing over deficiencies and weaknesses (for it is also an evaluation of the teachers' ability). The results are always better than the students' actual level. Besides constant tests take away from the time that could be spent on teaching, learning and correction of shortcomings. It skews the time spent upon teaching and learning in favour of time spent on examining and marking. Teachers, instead of *assisting* learning, spend most of their time *assessing* learning—one reason why there are few school-going children who do not also attend extra coaching classes. Instead

of enabling and equipping students to learn, schools have taken on the function of examining and screening out on the basis of those examinations.

Role-selection is done through streaming out those who are unwilling or unable to fit into the system and selecting those willing and able to play along with the system. This also ensures that those eliminated accept the outcome as just and unquestioningly agree to take on the lesser roles assigned to them, while those selected feel that they have earned or deserve their place in society. Dropouts are judged as bad losers who do not accept the outcome of a fair system. This function sits ill with the schools' avowed aim of providing equal opportunity to all and facilitating learning. The IDAC publication, *Danger School*, points out that most of the dropouts are from the lowest classes of society and that the professionals' children usually become professionals while children of unskilled workers become labourers. Earlier we had a rigid caste system but now we have a modern, rigid class system. The few anomalies are 'made much of' to advertise and highlight the fairness of the system and to insulate it from being challenged.

Further, as Illich points out that with the blurring of the distinction between process and content, a consumerist logic kicks into place. This is easily done as both the process and achievement are referred to by the same word 'education'. By this logic the more the years of schooling, the more 'educated' is the person. This also ensures that those who can afford to consume the most are the ones who are deemed the most qualified and hence best suited for the job. This belies a general expectation that schools are places that equip a person to enjoy equality of opportunity.

For those encountering these arguments for the first time, this may come as a shock. Today, to question the sanctity of schools is equivalent to questioning the existence of God or the sanctity of religion in the past. Others, who have encountered these ideas before are still struggling with the desire to deny the truth as well as the necessity of understanding and coming to terms with it. It is difficult to disregard our pet notions and cherished belief in the system of schooling.

Was this by design? A conspiracy? I don't think so. This is what has happened and to realize and recognize the shortcomings of the system is the first step to its correction. No one had deliberately set out to portray gender stereotypes in textbooks. And once, after a time lag, it sunk in how this was negatively affecting the girl students, we responded by trying to correct it. In the case of schooling too, we need to first understand exactly what is happening and only then can we move towards designing an appropriate corrective. In recognizing that schooling is not education, one is not necessarily concluding that schools cannot be educational.

The implication is that, as things stand today, schooling is not education nor is it a means of equality or social justice. The important question is: Where do we go from here? We cannot simply wish the situation away. Do we just deny and/or ignore this and continue to support the existing schooling system? Or should we try to make schools educational institutions once again? Or, has the time come for thinking of more efficient alternatives to the schooling system as Regmer, Illich and Holt have argued? It is clear that mere cosmetic tinkering with the curriculum and methods will not do, and that it is time for radically rethinking schooling.

Field notes

Jharkhand

EARLY February 2004, I was part of a team on a routine review mission visit to Jharkhand to look at budgets, revised plans and possibilities of extension of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) for another year. Many positive developments were reported. Over the past two years the pace of the DPEP programme has picked up. Separation seemed to have helped as Jharkhand was in fact moving ahead of its erstwhile parent state Bihar, at least in the implementation of the project. All habitations have a school, large teacher recruitment have brought the teacher pupil ratio to more favourable levels, and textbooks reach on time. Remarkable gains were reported in enrolling children, with an unbelievably small number of around 25,000 out of school. Nothing new here. This is a litany that one hears nowadays in most states where DPEP is being implemented.

In an otherwise tedious meeting of numbers and more numbing numbers, the discussion turned to interventions at the classroom level to improve learning. Even here one was skeptical. It had all been done or said before. Most strategies for improving quality in the teaching-learning process have a predictable trajectory – teacher training focused on child-centred pedagogy, better infrastructure, improved textbooks, classrooms often painted in hideous colours for ‘joyful learning’. I remember visiting a school in Bihar where in class I the sketch of a burly man twirling his moustache and wielding a gun loomed large over the tiny children sitting on the ground. The resemblance to the president of the village education committee was uncanny. No one felt that there was anything wrong with this. Every intervention claims to be child-centred and sensitive to the needs of children, but the child is most often not in sight.

There was talk of practical science learning, introduction of worksheets for curriculum coverage and to serve as a tool for daily assessment of what is taught and what is learnt by the child, and so on. Then began a discussion on how several programmes have been started for overall development of the child – regular organized sports and games, yoga, vipasana, libraries and radio programmes for children.

One listened with a degree of cynicism to the talk of how children and their needs were kept central to setting up of libraries in schools. The libraries set up

in the name of children often fall in one of two categories. Either the money is used to buy newspapers, magazines and books of interest for the teacher and other adults, or if a school has been supplied with a set of children’s books, the criteria for such selection often eluding any logic, the books are carefully locked in cupboards so that they do not get spoilt in usage!

So what was new in Jharkhand? A totally different and exciting process was adopted. It would perhaps have been easiest to have gotten a list from the National Book Trust and other publishers of children’s books and purchase titles tailored to the available budget. A common enough occurrence. Here, however, a rare sensitivity to the needs of the child was displayed – a recognition that an adult is perhaps not the best person to select books for children. A totally radical process to involve children in selection of books was decided on.

All booksellers, including the National Book Trust, were invited to set up an exhibition of their books. 300 children from different schools were invited to peruse the exhibition and select around 100 titles to be bought for school libraries. What the children selected were comics, science fiction, fairytales. No books on great warriors or heroes. The children’s list was not wetted by adults and became the basis for the purchase of books for the libraries.

This simple process has given greater meaning to the much touted concepts of child participation and child-centred education. A library hour has been added to the regular school timetable, with every child having access to books. Children are encouraged to record their views and comments on what they have read. It’s too early to assess the extent to which the books will be used. But the sheer possibility to touch, feel and handle a book which is not a textbook will perhaps do more for stimulating an interest in reading than anything else. By now, of course, one was fully awake and began to regret that there was not enough time to visit the field to talk to children, to see what was happening in schools.

Another area seems equally promising – the use of the radio for teachers and children. The radio is being used for teacher training as well, a popular pilot programme being the one on learning English. In some states, radio programmes have been designed around

the formal textbooks. Here in Jharkhand, a children's storytelling programme, *suno kahani* is aired everyday on AIR. A story is narrated with an unfinished ending. At the end of the programme a question is posed. Children listening to the programme are invited to send in their answers by post. Letters received in a week are assessed by a teacher's committee and a storybook posted to all those who answer correctly. This took me back to the days when I was an avid listener to the plays and stories broadcast over BBC.

The reach of the radio across state boundaries was amply demonstrated in a letter the programme received from Suman in Bihar. She writes, 'I heard your story for the first time today. It was very nice. After Jharkhand state has been formed separate from Bihar, there seem to be many good programmes for children. The situation here is as is. I am sure you send storybooks only to children who live in Jharkhand. Even so, I am sending answers to your questions as I believe what the Gita says: that one should do one's duty without expecting any fruits...' Suman, of course, will get her storybook. The number of children writing back has started mounting. One only hopes that the expectations of the children are met and they all get their storybooks.

With all the talk of India Shining and all the dark spots that belie this shine, these vignettes from Jharkhand give some hope that people, even in government, are exploring and pursuing creative ways of approaching children's learning. There is a rider of course. Will this be sustained by the next person who handles the project?

Kameshwari Jandhyala

Gauriganj dairy

January 21, 2004 – The sky was dark. A cold drizzle covered villages in Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh. The hard wet tar road turned into a soft muddy path as soon as one stepped off the main road and headed into a village. It was hard to see anything; it was difficult to talk to people because everyone was huddled at home staying out of the cold and rain.

Sultanpur is halfway between Lucknow and Allahabad. It is close to Amethi and Rae Bareli – well known places. The Gandhi family has fought elections from here. Pratapgarh is not far: infamous because of the recent Raja Bhaiyya episode. Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Rajnath Singh's constituency, Haidergarh, is next door. This is the heartland of Uttar Pradesh.

When the opportunity arose to work in a rural district in Uttar Pradesh we were intrigued. The idea was to go from zero to reaching and teaching 10,000 children to read in a short period of two months. Could this be done? Would we find enough local young people who wanted to work with children? Could we transfer our accelerated reading technique to the local volunteers so quickly? In all of this, could we make fast progress but stay out of the politics and dynamics of elections in the region?

A small team wandered through Sultanpur trying to understand the topography and the educational situation. Even though it was raining heavily, we learnt some things about the district: villages are clustered together – small and mid-sized habitations around a larger village. The whole cluster together is called a *mauja*. Roads and canals crisscross mustard fields. Standing anywhere on a road, you can see at least three or four clusters of villages in the distance. Schools are prominent everywhere, distinct in their white and green appearance.¹ Most children are enrolled in school. But in the schools and in the villages, there are lots of children, school-going children, who cannot read even a simple sentence.

We returned to Lucknow. In a few days, we would plan strategy, harness our resources and return to meet the challenge of getting every child to read in Sultanpur.

February 20, 2004 – It is about 9:30 in the morning. Our jeep winds its way through lush yellow and green fields. It is a beautiful winter day. The sun is bright and the air crisp. Children are running behind the jeep smiling, laughing and shouting 'Didi namaste, Didi namaste'. We drop off their 'didi' Neelam by the side of a canal near Vishnudaspur mauja in Gauriganj block. Children immediately surround her. Some are holding her hand, others are running ahead. Neelam heads towards the school with the children and does not even look around to wave goodbye to us.

Half an hour later we reach Majhwara, another large village about 10 kilometers from Gauriganj. Shikha jumps out of the jeep and goes into the school. She is a slim, confident girl from Allahabad. There is one teacher in this school. The official enrollment is 238. It is exactly 10 am. Most of the enrolled children are already there, sitting in the sun in rows in the courtyard. The teacher is distracted today because he has lost his glasses. Shikha says *namaste* and goes to her own group of children. They are waiting, sitting in a circle

1. The school construction and painting has been facilitated by the work of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

inside one of the rooms. They jump up as soon as she enters. Bright faces, boys and girls. About 10 days back these children could barely read words but now they want to show off their newly acquired reading skills. Books are opened to the story of the day. Turn by turn they start to read aloud, often looking up eagerly to smile at Shikha. Four young women and one young man are standing around this circle of children looking intently. These are local volunteers who want to help.

The strategy we have adopted in Sultanpur is simple. We decided to concentrate our work in one block – Gauriganj. It has 57 revenue villages, 78 government primary schools with a total enrollment of about 12,000 children. We estimate that at least 40% children cannot read; that makes our target about 5000-6000 who have to become readers in two months.

For a start, we targeted 20 of the bigger villages or maujas in the block. We figured that it would be easier to find and mobilize young educated people in the bigger villages. A team of 15 experienced Pratham instructors from Lucknow and Allahabad went into these villages for the first time on 9 February. Although they had all worked in urban slums, none had ever been to a village, much less taught rural children. They had several tasks to do: first, they had to meet the local pradhan or panchayat member and ask him whether they could start work in the village. Next, they had to find 25 children who could not read and immediately start teaching them. Third, they had to start looking for potential volunteers from the village or nearby villages who would want to teach children to read.

'I was really nervous on the first day,' says Ratan Manjusha earnestly. 'How would I find people to talk to, how would I know what to say? What if people get upset with me? They may think it is strange that a city girl is in their village. How would I find the village that I was to go to? There were so many questions on my mind.' Sitting on a haystack in the middle of a field, eating a packed lunch of poori-aloo, listening to her, it is hard to imagine that she had been nervous 10 days back. 'People were very polite and helpful. They listened to me and encouraged me to start teaching,' she said. Then shyly looking up, she continued, 'I feel so proud that I could do this by myself. Now I am ready to go anywhere and talk to anyone.'

Within a day or two, the Pratham team had started teaching 400 children. After discussions with the pradhan and the school headmaster, it was decided that the reading programme should happen during school hours in the school. In Gauriganj, enrolment of chil-

dren in the age group 6 to 12 is high. Daily attendance is also high. In school after school one can see lots of children. Not only are children keen on coming to school, but they also come well before school time. Since children are in school and enthusiastic, the school was the best place to start.

We began our direct demonstration classes with children (age seven and above) in 16 big villages. Initially out of about 400 children, only 5% could read simple paragraphs and 95% were struggling with simple words and letters. Today (20 February), 47% are reading simple paragraphs, some can even read stories. Another 33% are confidently reading words. The reading revolution is well underway.

In less than a week, the 15-member Pratham team has also convinced about 150 local volunteers to join in this effort. For a week, local volunteers have been watching the demonstration class and learning how to teach. They are being asked to assist: they are learning how stories should be read aloud, how word games are to be played, how to help children use the *barahkhadi* chart. Most of these volunteers have already located 25 children each who cannot read. In a few days they will start to help their village children to read. The numbers of children who are starting to read will swell to 3000 by the end of February.

Local volunteers are enthusiastic but they have questions. It is around noon in the courtyard of Basupur primary school. There are two young girls, one older woman with a *dupatta* around her head, one shy young man and a smart older boy in jeans. 'Will you be able to teach like these girls?' I asked pointing to a Pratham teacher. The group nods energetically. The smartly dressed young boy moves closer, 'Are we only going to do this for two months. What will we do after that?' he asks. One of the girls starts tentatively, 'Will we be paid? How do we know you will pay us?' The older lady has a firm voice. She says, 'These are our village children. We don't want money but we need to know what to do. Will you stay with us to make sure we are doing it right?'

On 18 February, another 12 Pratham people from Delhi joined their colleagues in Gauriganj. They are targeting another section of the block. Immediately they fanned out to a different set of maujas, teaching children and looking for volunteers as they move around. By the time we reach Muharram and Holi, in the first week of March, we should have helped another set of 300 children read and created a net of local volunteers who in turn will help another 3000 children.

Transferring our technique, approach and attitude is the challenge. Will the local volunteers stay

focused and feel the pressure of time like we do? Will they be able to elicit support from the village to encourage these children to read and to learn more? Will they be able to replicate the experiment to reach larger and larger numbers of children so that in a few months all children in the entire district are reading?

By Holi, Pratham's 'fast action jump-start' team will return to Lucknow, Allahabad and Delhi. Hopefully by the time they leave they will have demonstrated with 1000 children that fast visible change in reading is possible. Baseline tests with children were validated by the school principals. We will ensure that the final tests with children of the demonstration classes will be done in front of the pradhan and people from the village. A core team will stay behind to work with the large number of local volunteers. The core team and the local teams will aim to have all children above the age of seven in Gauriganj block reading fluently by the end of April.

There is much more ahead. Once children learn to read, immense horizons open up. In school after school and village after village, the enthusiasm and energy of children is infectious. Children who can read and write well are vying for attention. The Gauripur school is beyond a long stretch of mustard fields. It is just after lunchtime and children are returning to school. Seeing us they run up and want to chat. '*Sarso kaise nikalta hai?*' I ask, looking at the mustard fields that we are walking through. The girls giggle. They can't imagine that there is someone who doesn't know. One of them leans across and shows me where the seeds are.

The school has a huge yard that looks white because of the colour of the fine soil here. There is a large blackboard propped up against a chair. 'What is the name of your village?' Children rush to the blackboard to write. In large letters, a boy writes '*Belkhariyaan ka poorva*'. 'What is the name of your block?' More children want to write. 'Gauriganj'. 'The district?' At least 50 children are crowding around—all want to come and write. A left-handed boy writes 'Sultanpur'. We move to state. There is some controversy about how the joint letters in 'Uttar' should be written, but the argument is resolved quickly. Then we come to country. One girl writes '*Bharat*'. Another one quickly adds '*desh*'. Eyebrows knitted, tongue taut between her teeth 'Where is our country' I ask. A boy says '*Prithvi*'. Very knowledgeably he adds, 'You know the world is round.' 'Really?' I ask. We all look around at the flat, lush farmland around us. 'Masterji says so,' states the boy emphatically.

Today there are almost 40 Pratham people all over Gauriganj block. Every morning people go off in

different directions. They teach and they reach more and more people every day and talk to them about the importance of helping children learn. Some people argue, some help, others are quiet but everyone listens. In the evening they all return to Gudiya Bhawan in Gauriganj where the entire team is staying.

There are so many little and big stories everyday. Sanjay and Shabana come back from Darpipur. The panchayat is impressed with little Shabana's style of teaching. The pradhan and the school teachers have watched her all day. The villagers have loaned Sanjay a bicycle for the duration of his stay in Gauriganj. Tasleem, Radhika and Rahul have had a productive day in Amethi talking to students of the colleges. Student volunteers are keen to help after their exams. Maya returns tired but triumphant. She has been to Trilokpur and neighbouring maujas. There are no demonstration classes there but she wants to find local volunteers. Not only has the pradhan accompanied her to two schools in different maujas and participated in assessing children's reading skills, but he insisted on giving Maya a ride on his bicycle all the way back to the main road. Most pradhans and panchayats have been supportive. All gram panchayats meet on Wednesdays. Sanjay and Sanjeev have started attending these meetings to make 'reading' an agenda for the block.

Every day is a learning experience: for us, the children, the school, the panchayat and the village. The adults are watching keenly, observing closely. Some are skeptical. Schemes and programmes have come and gone and nothing really changes, they say. Can people's participation be sustained? Will people really rally round to solve simple problems together? Our young team is very straightforward. Things change when you change them, they say. The school is the village's own school. The children are the village's own children. It seems natural that village people should assist in helping children to learn.

It is almost dark. The *sabzi* bazaar is Gauriganj town is still crowded. A young college girl rides her cycle determinedly through the maze of shoppers and *thelawalas*, scooters and *tongas*. Her pink *salwar kameez* stands out brightly in the dark. The sharp breeze makes her dupattā flow behind her. Perhaps she will go back to her village and think about all the children who cannot read. Perhaps she too will come forward tomorrow.

Let us watch and see how this story unfolds.

Books

BASIC education is now legally a fundamental right of every child between the age of six and 14 years in India. Following the 86th constitutional amendment, which made basic education a fundamental right, the Government of India is now in the process of formulating a bill which would define the operational contours of the amendment. Several versions of the bill that is yet to be tabled in the Parliament, have been discussed and debated in policy circles. Varying opinions exist regarding what it should incorporate, especially when it comes to defining the 'right' in concrete terms.

Basic education as a fundamental right needs to be understood both as an absolute and relative notion. While it is important that all children are assured of a defined minimum (the minimum defined in a manner that ensures adequacy as well as suitability of opportunities and experiences), ensuring equality in education is no less crucial. Equality here refers not only to entitlements, but to opportunities and experiences. While the law defines the entitlement, provisions ensure the opportunities, and processes the experiences, only a combination of the three will ensure that the 'right' is exercised in its true spirit and intent.

Though varying in their objectives and focus, several recent reports and research studies in basic education provide a rich information base for wider analysis. They include both large survey based databases,

Literacy and Levels of Education in India 1999-2000 (NSS 55th Round). National Sample Survey Organisation, Government of India, 2001.

Progress Towards Universal Access and Retention by Yash Agarwal. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), 2000, 2001 and 2002.

Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education: Hierarchies of Access coordinated by Vimala Ramachandran. The European Commission, 2002.

Elementary Education for the Poorest and Other Deprived Groups: The Real Challenge of Universalisation by Jyotsna Jha and Dhir Jhingran. Centre for Policy Research, Delhi, 2002.

The Delivery of Primary Education: A Study in West Bengal. The Pratichi Trust Team, Pratichi (India) Trust, 2002.

Local Education Report (six – three rural and three urban – area reports). National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, 2002.

indepth local reports and a combination of the two. Despite different contexts and methodologies, a number of observations and findings are similar, validating each other and thus deserving of greater attention. These studies clearly outline the challenges that exist in making basic education a fundamental right of every child.

All these reports are based on recent data and fieldwork, information largely pertaining to the period 1999-2001. Based on a large sample household survey, the NSS report provides detailed data on educational attainment levels, disaggregated for economic, social and religious groups in rural and urban areas. The NIEPA series is based on analyses of school based data from about half of the country's districts, those covered by the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). Apart from an analysis of available data from secondary sources, Ramachandran includes six micro studies conducted in six states. Drawing on fieldwork in 11 districts across 10 states and five urban centres, Jha and Jhingran analyse educational deprivation in different contexts and highlight the interplay of factors that impact educational participation. The Pratichi Trust Report focuses on various aspects of delivery of primary education in West Bengal and raises significant issues about quality and accountability. The six local reports covering six localities in six different states by NIAS foreground the need for a shift in the institutional role of school and school-system in order to make schooling a meaningful experience for all children.

In all its major dimensions – class, caste and gender – equity emerges as the most crucial concern in basic education. The NSS 55th round report clearly shows that educational attainment levels are the lowest for the population with the lowest per capita consumer expenditure. Only about one-fourth of the males and one-eighth of the females among the poorest one-fifth population had completed primary education as against two-third males and nearly half of the female population in the richest one-fifth population in rural areas. Among the social groups, tribals and dalits are closely followed by OBCs as educationally the most

deprived. Muslims educationally are the most deprived religious group in both urban and rural areas. Educational attainment levels are significantly low for girls as compared to boys within each social, economic and religious group.

The NSS data refers to the age group of seven years and above, and it could be argued that the situation would be markedly different if only the younger age group population was in focus. Unfortunately, all evidence points to the situation being only marginally better. The Jha and Jhingran study – also based on household survey, albeit a much smaller sample – indicates that the school participation rates for the basic education age group show similar gaps and disparities between and within economic, social and religious groups. It appears that though school participation rates have increased for all groups, significant disparities across groups continue to exist. It is difficult to compare these with school-based statistics, not only because they do not differentiate between economic, religious and social groups but also because they usually do not include data from private schools. The DISE survey, on which the NIEPA analysis is based, includes data from recognised private schools but not unrecognised private schools, thereby leaving out a significant proportion of school-going children from its ambit.

Despite limitations of school based data, that too primarily from government schools, the NIEPA series which started in 1997, became more comprehensive over time and provides useful pointers. The incorporation of new parameters including disability related information, gender-segregated data for enrolment within social groups, grade-wise enrolment, medium of instruction and detailed teacher profiles have added value and reflect related issues. Decreasing social and gender disparity in terms of enrolment in government schools seem to confirm independent observations regarding shift of higher class/caste male enrolment to private schools and the overwhelming presence of girls, dalit and tribal children in government schools, especially in northern and eastern parts of the country. The NIAS local education reports, based largely on case studies of government and private schools, also confirm this trend. However, increased enrolment does not necessarily mean high completion, as the cohort analysis referred to in the NIEPA (2001) report shows. Completion rates for dalit and tribal children are significantly lower in comparison to others.

The fact that socially and economically deprived groups form a significant proportion of both government school and out-of-school children population has

implications for school processes at the micro level and the government school-system at policy and macro levels. It becomes especially significant if every child is to be ensured a fundamental right to basic education. The responsibility of providing access to educational opportunities and experiences in a manner that helps them overcome their disadvantages, learn and face life from a position of strength, is enormous.

The NIEPA (2001) report¹ recognizes expansion of schooling facilities, especially in DPEP districts, through opening of formal, alternative and education guarantee schools.² However, it also recognizes that the mere presence of a school within the habitation does not ensure equal access to all children. Jha and Jhingran elaborate this issue especially in the context of dalits, tribals and other marginalised communities. Dalit families in general and the more marginalised among them in particular, reside in segregated localities that are usually the most disadvantaged in terms of physical access and facilities. Schools, on the other hand, are usually situated in localities inhabited by more dominant social group making it difficult for children from disadvantaged sections to attend. Tribal areas are usually sparsely populated with different habitations within one village remaining completely isolated from each other, and the presence of a school in one of these does not ensure participation from other habitations.

The issue of access is not limited only to the existence of a school within the habitation, though undoubtedly it is one of the most critical requirements. The presence of an adequate number of teachers, space and facilities in school is also important. While a number of recent papers and articles have highlighted the inequality between the formal and AS/EGS schools, the inequality within formal schools which continues to cover significant proportion of population in most states, has received considerably less attention. Ensuring adequate space, facilities and teachers is essential for all schools, notwithstanding the category to which

1. Since 2000, the NIEPA reports have been divided into two parts – Analytical Report and District Report Card. However, for 2002, only district report cards were compiled and the analytical reports could not be developed. For 2003, the district report cards are available but not the analytical report.

2. Alternative Schools (AS) and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) schools are new initiatives started in many states where access has been a major issue. These are usually started in a space provided by the community and run by local teachers who have similar educational qualification as the formal school teacher except for professional training. The government pays them an honorarium, which in general is much lower than regular teachers' salary and provides support for teacher training, teaching learning materials and supervision.

they belong. The NIEPA (2000) report highlights that despite substantial investment in construction, the infrastructure position is far from satisfactory even in DPEP districts.

The highly skewed distribution of teachers worsens the situation created by a high pupil-teacher ratio (PTR). More than 50% of schools in DPEP districts had a PTR higher than 60:1 in 2001. Similarly, the problem of low availability of women teachers, except in southern states, is compounded by their concentration in a few schools, largely located in urban and near-urban areas. It is obvious from Jha and Jhingran, NIAS and Ramachandran that the situation is worse in schools located in remote habitations and areas with a larger concentration of poor, dalit and tribal population. Obviously, the political economy of social relations and power plays a role in decisions relating to distribution of resources and deployment of teachers.

The functioning of schools in terms of regularity and observation of timings, or creating meaningful learning experiences for children, is even more critical for ensuring children their right. However, it is here that the failure is most marked and obvious. Jha and Jhingran, NIAS, Pratichi Trust Report and Ramachandran make clear that schools with larger concentration of children from poor and labouring class families are far more irregular and function for fewer hours. As dominant caste, better educated and middle class parents withdraw their children from government schools, the accountability of teachers and the pressure on them to teach or perform decreases. Engagement with issues of survival, especially in a situation of growing casualisation of work leading to an insecure livelihood position, makes it difficult for these parents to wield any influence on school functioning.

Apart from remaining absent and coming to school for fewer hours than prescribed, teachers also spend substantial time in performing non-teaching tasks. Some of these tasks such as collection of grain for midday meals, attending meetings, making salary bills, and so on are part of their responsibilities as teachers, whereas others such as participating in different kinds of surveys related to electoral rolls, census, poverty line are outside their usual work but which they cannot refuse as government servants. The impact of these on school functioning is worse in places where the number of teachers is low.

It is common for parents to point to frequent closure of schools and for teachers to refer to high irregularity among children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Jha and Jhingran and NIAS show that the

irregularity is higher for children from poor households, because they often share the responsibility of household chores, are engaged in seasonal family or paid labour, remain ill due to malnutrition and, in specific situations, migrate for long durations. Teachers, however, instead of being empathetic to the life-situation of children usually perceive this as evidence of lack of interest in education and consider it responsible for eventual dropouts and non-completion. Instead of considering themselves accountable for their students' learning, teachers believe that these children do not want to learn and become indifferent, if not hostile, to them.

Field reports based on classroom observation, teachers' interviews and interaction with children in Jha and Jhingran, NIAS, Pratichi Trust Report and Ramachandran indicate that class and caste barriers in schools are a major impediment in school participation of children from poorer and less privileged families. It is not uncommon for teachers to consider children from poor and socially deprived backgrounds as 'incapable of being educated'. Schooling experiences of children from such backgrounds are full of discrimination meted out by teachers as well as peer group. It is overt when dalit children are seated separately from others at the time of serving cooked meals and subtle when they are seated in the last row, not receiving any attention from the teacher. Stereotypical statements about Muslim students and parents as uninterested in education are also common. Accepting high irregularity and dropouts as inevitable makes it difficult for teachers to understand the role of ineffective and dysfunctional schools in weakening parental commitment to education among poorer and disadvantaged families.

These reports provide evidence of biased attitude and behaviour of teachers. But the majority, coming from upper caste and middle class strata, refuse to acknowledge that any form of discrimination exists. They, however, do not refrain from showing resentment against incentive schemes and reservation policy meant for poor and socially disadvantaged sections in front of children, often adding that despite various schemes, it is difficult to change the plight of 'these' children because they can never overcome their background. These teachers appear to be unaware of the impact of such comments on children. In most cases, the teachers have a low expectation of students from poor socio-economic backgrounds, a major reason for their low performance. For children, these experiences are a denial of their basic right.

Through the 1990s the debate on quality in basic education has usually revolved around pedagogic aspects of the learning processes – based entirely on copying and rote memorization – and transaction processes not being based on active involvement of children. Barring a few exceptions, teacher-training efforts have been directed towards these aspects of quality. Without undermining their importance, it is necessary to point out that socio-psychological needs of children, especially when they come from socially and economically deprived situations, are equally, and in some cases, more important. Their experiences in schools tend to reinforce and heighten the discrimination that they face in society, adversely affecting their continuation and learning. These studies drawing on evidence from varying contexts, underscore that the debate on quality without addressing equity, and exclusion, is meaningless.

The commonly articulated distinction between equity as an issue of access and learning conditions alone, and quality as distinct from the issue of equity is artificial and simplistic. The Pratichi Trust Report's observations regarding Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs)³ functioning better than well resourced formal schools needs to be understood in this context. Despite poor infrastructure and meagre payments, the SSK teachers have been able to develop a more conducive teacher-student relationship because of their better understanding and appreciation of children's home situations. The study attributes this to all teachers being local women, their role definition requiring them to contact parents frequently and an inbuilt local accountability system which allows a greater role for the local community. The studies are near uniform in their observation that functioning, including children's attendance, was markedly better in schools, formal or alternative, where teachers extended their role and developed an appreciation for local culture and home constraints.

These studies also recognize, though articulated differently, that commitment to education is weak among poor and socially disadvantaged households, especially in areas where they have traditionally been excluded from education. The presence of a large number of never-enrolled children, many of them engaged in paid labour, lends credence to this fact. Constraints posed by poverty, uncertainty and unstable life situations coupled with weak education-employment linkages, also play a role in keeping this commitment low. Despite understanding the impor-

tance of education *per se* the tough life-situation makes it difficult to have high aspirations and pursue them with demonstrated demand for education.

Ramachandran and Jha and Jhingran too highlight the presence of competing inequities where the relative positioning changes with a change in context and area. Nonetheless, girls are more marginalised and vulnerable in almost all contexts, and socio-cultural beliefs and practices have a major role in perpetuating this phenomenon. These studies suggest that areas which have experienced social movements, or where sending children to schools has become a social norm, remain exceptions. Though children from very poor and socially marginalised families do attend school despite facing discrimination in school and deprivation at home, instances of children being forced to leave schooling due to some economic crisis are not unusual. The responsibility of schools and the school system, in fact, increases in cases of weak parental commitment in ensuring that all children learn and complete education. Teachers or education administration cannot be absolved on these grounds if every child is to be ensured this right.

Commitment to basic education as a fundamental right for every child has serious implications for both the school system, and society as a whole. Schools needs to function as institutions which help children overcome their class and caste barriers. In the current scenario, this requires a radical shift in teachers' commitment as highlighted by the Pratichi Trust Report. Jha and Jhingran argue for defining and developing completely different norms and mechanisms for accountability with equity as the central focus for teachers as well as educational administration. All decisions relating to distribution of resources, deployment of teachers and monitoring of progress need to be based on transparent and clearly defined norms of equity and diversity. All six studies support decentralisation with real delegation and devolution of power.

Ramachandran warns against superficial decentralisation and changes in accountability mechanisms without ensuring adequate safeguards as they could also be manoeuvred by vested interests. NIAS (2002) suggests the creation of a crisis fund in education to support children who are forced to discontinue due to some sudden distress situation. The overarching message from these researches is that ensuring basic education to every child in India today is above all an issue of equity and justice..

3. Loosely, it can be seen as a variant of EGS school in West Bengal.

GOING TO SCHOOL IN INDIA by Lisa Heydlauff.
Penguin Enterprise, Delhi, 2003.

BOOKS on education, more so if the focus is on schools, almost invariably make for a depressing read. For years now, our educationists and pedagogues, specially those trained in the social sciences, have bombarded us with a litany of despair: about the sad state of our schools, the work-shirking teacher, figures of low enrolment and high dropouts, and the abysmal quality of learning. This is often accompanied by an analysis of out-of-school, the never enrolled children. And, of course, the fact that access to education is heavily skewed in favour of the better-off-male, upper caste and upper class.

Evidently, the days of schooling as fun, of inspiring teachers as *gurujis*, of how Lal Bahadur Shastri crossed rivers to attend school are firmly in the past. Fortunately, Lisa Heydlauff's book is different. It is a celebration of what school can be 'from kids to kids, to you and me.' It tells us how getting to school is a 'wild ride' – not only the kind the DTC and private buses subject Delhi's children to, but the exhilaration of cycling to school, riding on bullock carts and boats, walking across the bamboo bridge in Assam or the rope swing in Ladakh. Accompanied by evocative photographs (sometimes marred by over-enthusiastic and intrusive efforts at design), they capture both the joy and effort of young children.

Read the story of the 'school in the sky' in Ladakh, how Haider Ali Molla, all of age 10 and confined to a wheelchair, is 'pushed' by his friends to school everyday. His ambition, to play football. Or how, in earthquake devastated Bhuj, children frequent their rubble-strewn school, building more durable structures in their imagination. From the SWRC run night school in Rampura to the Shiv Mandir in Patna that doubles up as a learning centre, to St Mary's in Mumbai that shares its facilities with less privileged children from Al Madrasa Tus Saifiya Tul Bachaniyah School, providing evidence of cooperation and integration which our political class determinedly fails to learn – the examples can be multiplied.

Each tale carries a lesson, not moral, but from everyday life – proving once again, as if proof was needed – that given an opportunity all children are keen to learn, that with some guidance and a lot of free 'space' they can create a joyful and learning environment, even in stressful surroundings like the Dal Lake in Srinagar or the barren landscape of Kutch. There is the lovely profile of Ramesh, age 6, Chunda, age 10 and

their sister Samta, age 12 who ride three on a bicycle, all of six kilometres, for an hour to get to school. Or the equally evocative 'school on wheels' which takes the classroom to the children.

We learn how children help other children, how the example of one inspires the other and how children's dreams remain as wild and 'fantabulous' as ever. What is needed is effort by us to not, once again, fail our young, stifling their dreams before they have a chance to flower.

Harsh Sethi

GETTING CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL:
Case Studies in Primary Education edited by
Vimala Ramachandran. Sage Publications, New
Delhi, 2003.

THIS is an interesting and useful collection of case studies, mainly of non-governmental efforts to bring out-of-school children into school. Each of these organizations is well-known in its area, and to concerned professionals. But to the public at large, little is known of the approaches and particular solutions being tried out. It is this gap in information that the book has tried to fill. A study of ten selected efforts, it gives a flavour of the concern, commitment and ingenuity that characterizes these and other similar efforts.

The problem, which the groups here studied have tried in different ways to address, relates to the fact that a significant proportion of children are not in school, that many of those who enrol drop out within a few years, and that even those who do not drop out frequently learn very little. In other words, the problem is multi-dimensional, encompassing issues around enrolment, retention and quality. Much of the public discourse has tended to focus on enrolment. The cases discussed in this book, however, are examples of attempts to span all three dimensions and to find innovative solutions to the needs of children in especially difficult circumstances.

There is often perceived to be a schism between 'micro' efforts and the 'working to scale' which characterizes government programmes. Usually, those in charge of the latter are unwilling to consider the possibility of learning from micro efforts because, it is argued, the translation to scale changes the nature of the problem. This collection of case studies, through its careful articulation of backward and forward linkages, and of the processes by which the programmes

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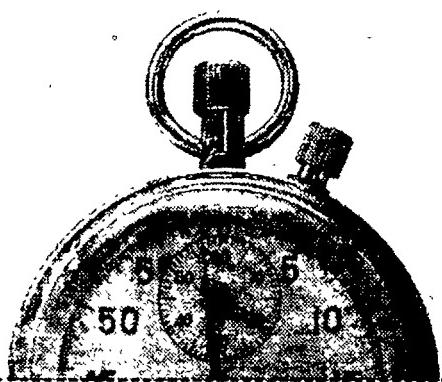
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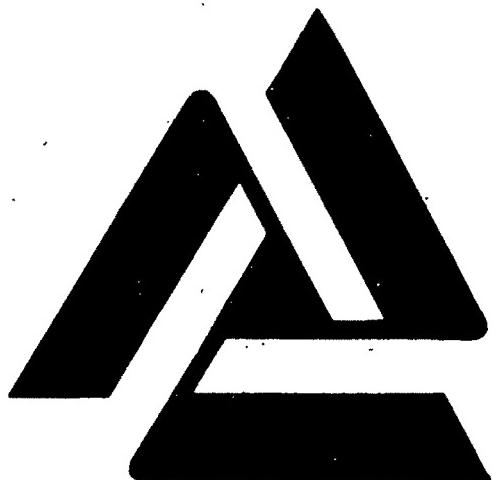
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have developed, provides insight into the relevance of scale. The conventional way of approaching the issue is to see how large scale government programmes could be modified so as to incorporate learning from micro effort. Alternatively, one could treat the micro effort as the base and try to upscale it. Both these perspectives have their limitations. A third way might be for the macro effort to provide the backdrop and the linkages for myriad different micro efforts to flourish, an approach in which diversity and experiment is itself the approach of the mainstream. Although no such explicit recommendation is made in this book, it is an approach worth further consideration.

The case studies in this volume are divided into three sections, 'children, work and education', 'meaningful access, relevance and quality', and 'reaching the unreached', each of which is briefly introduced by the editor. The first set includes those who have specially focused on working children and tried to bring them into full time education. The experiences discussed are the Namma Bhoomi initiative of the Concerned for Working Children in Karnataka, Baljyothi in Andhra, CINI Asha – an initiative of the Child in Need Initiative in Kolkata, and CREDA (Centre for Rural Education and Development Action) in Mirzapur. The second group includes initiatives that have especially dealt with issues of quality and relevance. This includes Pratham, Mumbai; Nali Kali, Mysore and Digantar, Rajasthan. The third group includes initiatives that have made special efforts to reach out to the hard core of difficult to reach children. This includes Agragamee's efforts with tribal children in Orissa, Muktagan's work with the Sahariya tribe in Rajasthan, and the DPEP's Model Cluster Development Approach in Uttar Pradesh.

The initiatives discussed are relatively new, the oldest dating back to the 1980s. This period witnessed a great burst of activity in the NGO sector, not least because of more liberal funding norms as well as a stronger encouragement to NGO activity on the part of the central government. Many of the programmes discussed here, i.e. educational initiatives with children, have emerged from larger development oriented programmes. This is an important point since it suggests that more holistic interventions, with loosely defined sectoral boundaries, may enjoy greater success. The reasons why a child is not in school may lie outside the school, but should it be a part of the school's sphere of action? Similarly some of the more nuanced efforts – for example, CINI's work with street children – are responses to locale specific situations, grounded

in local realities. Even though most of the programmes discussed in this book are young, they have already had to adapt, change and evolve from the initial design.

If what we need is locale specific action, a definition of the solution that is not rigid, and a readiness to change in response to better understanding or new problems, the key factor underlying the success of any such effort is flexibility and continuous innovation. This is not compatible with a programme approach that requires standardization and fixation of norms. At the same time, the actual content of the education and the certification that is given to children, will be of value only if it is what the mainstream system provides. The conclusion seems inescapable: we can reach out to the unreached, bring all children into school, ensure a meaningful education for them, only if we can somehow find a way of incorporating diversity within the mainstream.

Ratna M. Sudarshan

EDUCATION DIALOGUE. Volume I, Issue I.
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THIS new journal, published by Padma Sarangapani of Bangalore, has been launched by a group of educationists drawn from different parts of the country and with a wide range of institutional affiliations. It seeks to provide a space for debating issues central to education in South Asia and also bridge the divide between academics and practitioners. This is indeed a unique endeavour – one that fills a vacuum in extant educational discourse. The journal spans both contemporary concerns – on the notion of quality by Rohit Dhankar, the challenges facing the right to education by Ramya Subramaniam and an interesting case study of Eklavya by Sarada Balgopalan – and historical analysis – a historical review of education in India by Judith Walsh. The end page (akin to the Backpage of *Seminar*) focuses on the traumatized children of Kashmir.

The overall design and presentation of the journal requires more care. Being the inaugural issue, it is of course somewhat premature to pronounce judgement on the quality of the journal – the endurance of the journal depends not only on the grit and determination of the promoters to plug on year after year but also the contribution of practitioners and researchers working in this sector. Equally, the sustainability of the journal depends on the ability of the promoters to engage with burning contemporary issues. But, above all, its eventual success will depend upon the willing-

ness of the larger education community to use the journal as a platform for open debate and discussion.

Vimala Ramachandran

TEACHING AND LEARNING: Culture of Pedagogy by Prema Clarke. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001.

CONSTRUCTING SCHOOL KNOWLEDGE: An Ethnography of Learning in an Indian Village by Padma M. Sarangapani. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003.

WITH the quality of education in classrooms increasingly being recognised as a critical element in influencing student performance, the debate on what constitutes quality teaching-learning processes has picked up momentum in recent years in India. The context is one of expanded access to and increasing enrolment in government primary schools and the proliferation of private schools, accompanied by a growing concern whether those who are receiving basic education in schools (or out of it) are actually learning something. However, systematic interrogation of teaching and learning processes and practices, apart from a few studies on pedagogical reforms under the District Primary Education Program (DPEP), are rare, though essential to inform educational reforms. The studies reviewed here are a welcome addition to educational scholarship and significantly contribute to the field through a critical expansion of the parameters of analysis and debate.

Prema Clarke locates her research among school-teachers in private, government and aided schools in Bangalore, Karnataka within the larger analytical context of culture and pedagogy. She explores the different ways in which teachers conceptualise and perform instructional tasks in the classroom with a particular emphasis on understanding the cultural patterning of teachers—their worldviews and frameworks of action. Clarke argues that along with other economic, political and demographic factors, culture plays a significant role in defining ways in which teachers relate to students; in the goals that teachers have for student learning; in the ways they approach the curriculum and the textbook; in the way knowledge is communicated to the students; and in ways they interact verbally with their students.

Drawing from anthropological and psychological research done in India, Clarke identifies four cul-

tural constructs that are interconnected and together represent the broader cultural meaning system that scaffolds pedagogical practices in classrooms in India. This includes a shared holistic worldview that supports the acceptance of regulation whereby the interdependence of actors allows them to be 'at ease at being regulated and regulating.' The primacy of the syllabus for the teachers in the research study and its contested relationship to prescribed textbooks as well as teacher's persistent regulation of students' behaviour in and out of the classroom indicates an acceptance of regulation. Accompanying the holism is the conception of 'instruction as duty' that stems from a cultural moral order and hence is viewed as being obligatory by the teacher. Again, just as teachers feel that they have a duty to teach their students, teachers also clearly define their students' and by extension their parents' duty as learning. Clarke observes that 'motivation' does not emerge as a significant dimension in teacher thinking with reference either to their own instruction to student learning and suggests that it is possible that motivation is intimately connected in their minds to regulation.

The third cultural construct is a social framework defined by a structural and qualitative hierarchy—the former based on the caste structure and the latter on the qualities possessed by individuals who hold a higher position. This is evident in the position of authority accorded to the teacher who is considered more knowledgeable. Finally, there is a shared understanding that knowledge is collectively accumulated, attested and transferred. This implies that an individual's actions are often framed by the community rather than his/her own experience and perceptions. This has important consequences for teaching-learning processes since it diminishes the role of the individual as a creator of knowledge and encourages a learning culture that reinforces the student's lower order thinking skills, characterised by memorisation and repetition. As Clarke writes, 'teachers, regulated by the primacy of syllabus, help their students understand and know the syllabus in its entirety through repetition and memorisation. Higher order thinking typified by analysis and reasoning is rarely upheld in the Indian educational system.'

Clarke's study has important implications for pedagogical reform, since it highlights the fact that it is not only pre-service training inputs that define how teachers teach, but that their lived experiences—as a child, student, and parent—in specific cultural contexts equally frame their thinking and performance

in the classroom. She argues that in order to enable a teaching-learning transformation, the cultural models of teacher thinking and teaching need to change. She advocates that the discourse of ‘indigenization’ that has dominated the agenda of educational reform in the country should be replaced by that of ‘contextualization’ – a shift not necessarily limited to making education relevant to local contexts, ‘but specifically with reference to the importance of analysing existing practice irrespective of its link with the past.’ She considers the ways in which the identified cultural constructs impact on proposed pedagogical reforms and observes that holism as well as conceptions of task as duty are open to reform while the emphasis on hierarchy and collective-decision-making is more resistant to change.

Padma Sarangapani’s focus is on children and their experiences of schooling in a government primary school in a multi-caste village bordering the northern periphery of Delhi. She goes beyond the banal evocations of the ‘dreary monotony of teaching-learning’ and ‘uninterested authoritarian teachers’ to explore the process and meaning of schooling in the village as it is constituted by the inter-subjectivity of teachers and students – what she refers to as an ‘insider’s’ perspective. This provides for a more nuanced understanding of schooling that is embedded in a ‘worldview’ shared by teachers and children and from which they derive their norms and values which guide their course of everyday actions. She also makes an issue of nesting her analysis within the larger ideological context of the extant social and economic hierarchies of the village and the role of education as a tool for social mobility.

Sarangapani dwells in detail on the construction of pupil and teacher identities and teacher authority as they get played out in the classrooms. She explores the discursive as well as material construction of ‘failure’ that not only defines student performance in the classroom but also frames their subjectivity and acts as a mechanism of social control. Not surprisingly, the author observes that all children who are deemed as ‘failures’ are either from scheduled caste or migrant families who have come to the village. Further, explanations such as laziness and being ‘thick’ seem to provide these children with new reasons, attributable to individual characteristics, for being at the bottom of the social pile. This logic of social exclusion is further reinforced through the social dynamics of teacher and students’ engagement in the classroom that has the power to define whose knowledge will

become a part of school-related knowledge – whose voice will shape it and whose voice shall be rendered silent.

Sarangapani argues that such an analysis makes it possible to ask more fundamental questions. What does education mean to children? Why do children submit to the discipline of the school? Such questions have important implications for transforming the educational system as opposed to merely addressing issues of attendance and teacher motivation with a view to ‘fixing’ and ‘managing’ them within a normative and evaluative framework – what she views as constituting the current orthodoxy. For instance, conversations with children reveal the common understanding of school as a site where they are socialised in the norms of adulthood. The author suggests that the introduction of play and activities as part of the school curricula in the above context has limited success precisely because of the emergent contradiction and probably also explains why parents too are suspicious of activity-based experimental curricula.

The studies are mutually reinforcing in their ideas, even though their primary focus is on different actors – teachers for Clarke and students for Sarangapani. They provide readers with a rich ethnography of the teaching-learning processes in their respective research sites and successfully communicate the ‘social embeddedness’ of the processes. Both studies rely on the juxtaposition of the first person narrative within an interpretative analytical framework to capture the complexity of the issue under exploration. Drawing inspiration from diverse scholarship, including anthropology, social and cognitive psychology, and sociology of education and knowledge, the studies demonstrate the strength and desirability of interdisciplinary perspective and qualitative analysis in social policy research.

Some critics may find the attention to detail and the primacy accorded to theoretical frameworks a little too abstract to inform policy in order to meet the immediate goals of Education for All. However, the soundness of analysis in actuality lends itself to developing a more sustainable model of educational reform – of teachers, curriculum, learning assessment – that is grounded in the lived realities of students and teachers as members of larger communities and society. It encourages critical reflection among teachers as well as students and enables a more meaningful experience of teaching and learning to happen.

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Backpage

*Bharat Uday Ke Bad Bhi, Neta Hamara So Raha
Maal Itna Kha Liya, Ki Feel Good Good Ho Raha*

JINGLES and jokes often tell us more about how our electorate views the forthcoming hustings than either the many psephological projections doing the rounds or the intuitive forecasts by our innumerable political pundits.

It hardly seems to matter that candidate lists of each major party are, at the time of writing, only partially fixed and announced, that they will go through many revisions before the final date of withdrawal. Or that alliances/adjustments are still to be firmed up, particularly in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh. It is also evident to all but the diehards or propagandists that there is no all-India wave and that despite immense (public) resources being sunk in an 'India Shining' campaign, the 'feel good' factor is shared by only a few.

Nevertheless, the bulk of our political analysts have already declared these elections as a 'no contest', citing in their support numerous opinion polls. Even the fact that so many of them have so often proved wide off the mark fails to dampen their enthusiasm. Like astrologers, psephologists too refuse to be dissuaded by repeated failure.

Despite the more sophisticated deploying a vast array of data to buttress their claims – vote shares in previous elections, caste/community projections, the arithmetic logic of alliances, likely swings based on the 'incumbency factor', and so on – and putting a scientific gloss on what essentially is inspired guesswork, the simple fact is that it is much too early to hawk final results. Making forecasting even more hazardous is the inordinately long drawn out nature of the current contest, for no one knows what shifts and turns are in store. It almost appears that we are unwilling to accept that elections are, in the end, an open process and that our voters have a nasty habit of springing surprises.

Accompanying this 'meaningless' obsession with end results is the veritable absence of debate over issues. Of course, all ruling regimes make inflated claims about their 'record' in office and when that proves difficult, promise that unattended concerns will claim priority if only they are voted back to power. Equally, those seeking to unseat them paint a uniformly negative picture. We are bombarded with allegations of scams (past and present), of the (mis)use of official machinery, whisper campaigns about the private life

of individuals, but rarely a worthwhile debate on policies and programmes.

Take for instance the issue of water – its availability, distribution, pricing, cleanliness. In a country where so much of agriculture is rain dependant and climate changes induced by global warming are playing havoc with monsoon patterns, ground water levels have dipped to alarming depths and surface water sources are polluted and destroyed, one would have expected a more vigorous engagement with the grandiose plan of linking rivers, garland canals and inter-basin transfer of waters. Despite dozens of researches predicting that conflicts over water use may soon replace even ethnic conflicts as the biggest source of tension, our political establishment has so far refused to share with us the plans, if any, for meeting anticipated challenges.

Is it that the electoral battle ground is an inappropriate site to discuss substantive issues? Did not the BSP (*bijli, sadak, pani*) factor play an important role in the recent assembly elections? So why the reluctance, even in these early days when campaigning is still to reach a fever pitch, to introduce manifestos and policy details to the electorate to help meaningful choice.

Is it that the recent defeats of Digvijay Singh and Ashok Gehlot despite their 'commendable' efforts at drought management, decentralization of power to local bodies and education guarantee, have persuaded the political class that it is safer to stick to emotive issues of dynasty, foreign origin and family sacrifice? To reduce the democratic process to a mix of *tamasha*, concerted propaganda and micro-management of caste demographics in constituencies is only to lose out on one of the few possibilities we as citizens have to hold our elected rulers to account.

This is the time to demand details on policy and performance, to explore the worldviews of our leaders rather than discuss their conversations on the dining table. It is a testimony to the times we live in that leading lights of our media, both TV and print, prefer to question the leader of the Opposition, not on key issues, but on her relationship with her mother-in-law and the likelihood of her children contesting elections. This after many tedious articles on the 'Silent Sphinx' and the unapproachability of the lady. But then, with each political party parading their latest catch of celebrities and the media dutifully reporting it as 'news', this is all we can possibly expect.

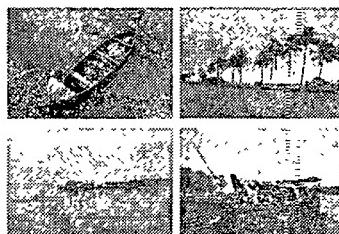
Harsh Sethi

S TEP INTO WATERCOLOURS BY GOD.

And suddenly,
you're a poet.

Kumarakom, the heart of backwater country.

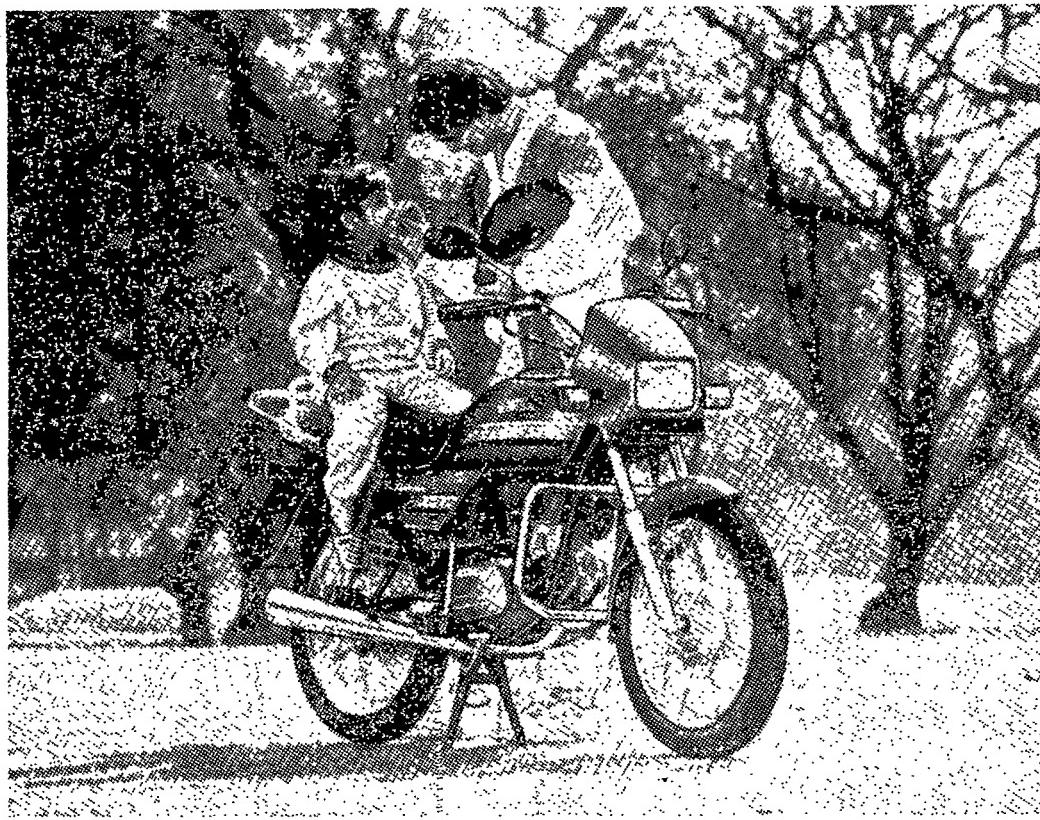
In a million shades of green, the endless backwaters meander. Lilies bloom. Lotuses smile. Children play. Coir-women sing. Butterflies dance. Fishes plop. Birds dive. Elephants bathe. The wind whispers. Paddy fields prance. Bullock carts jingle. Ducks glide. Boats sail. Life flows. And suddenly, you're a poet.



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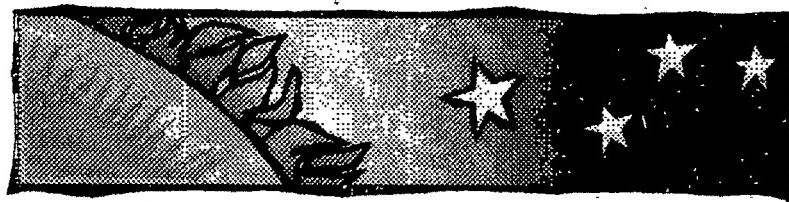
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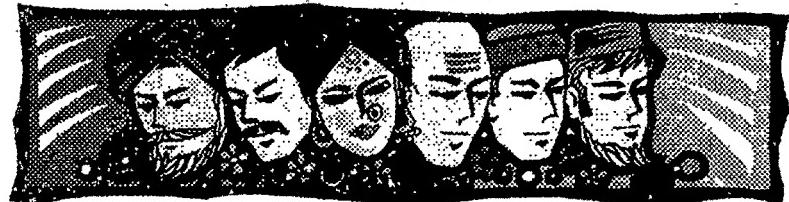
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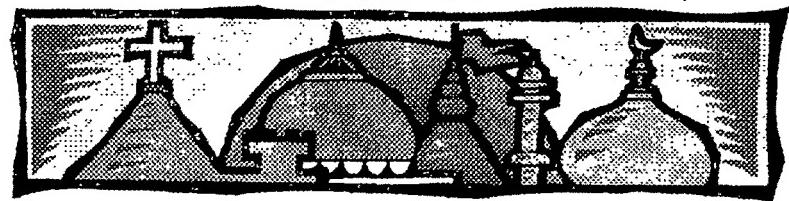
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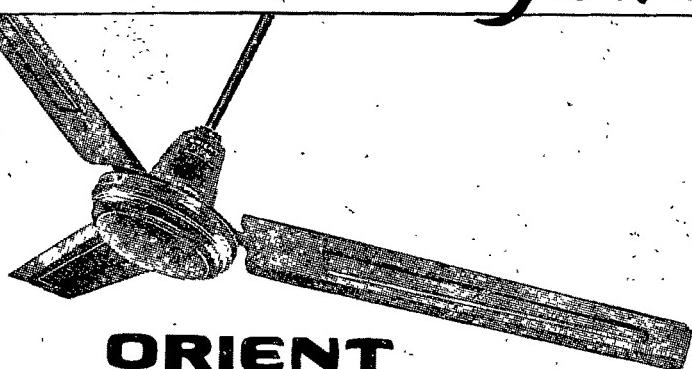
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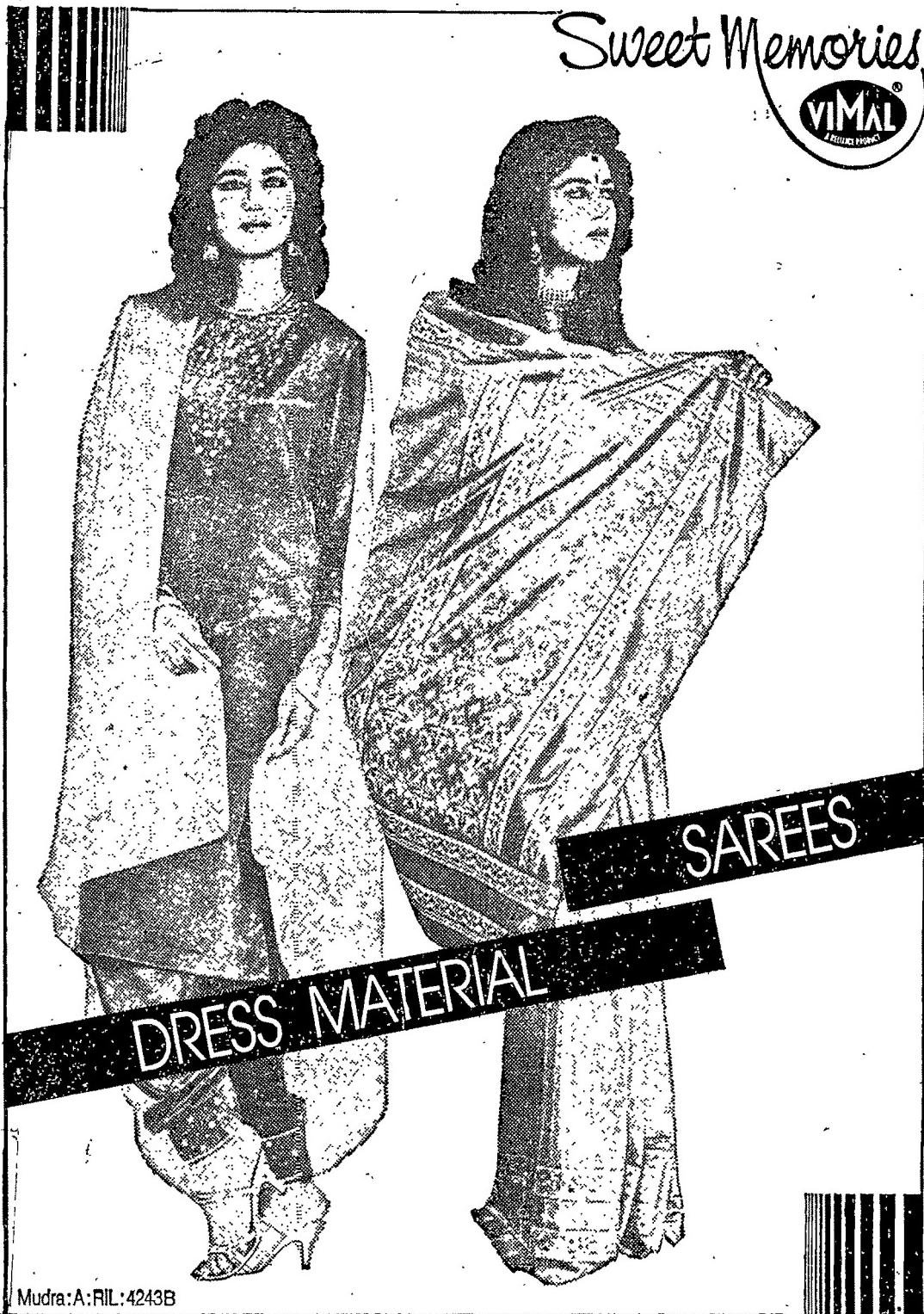
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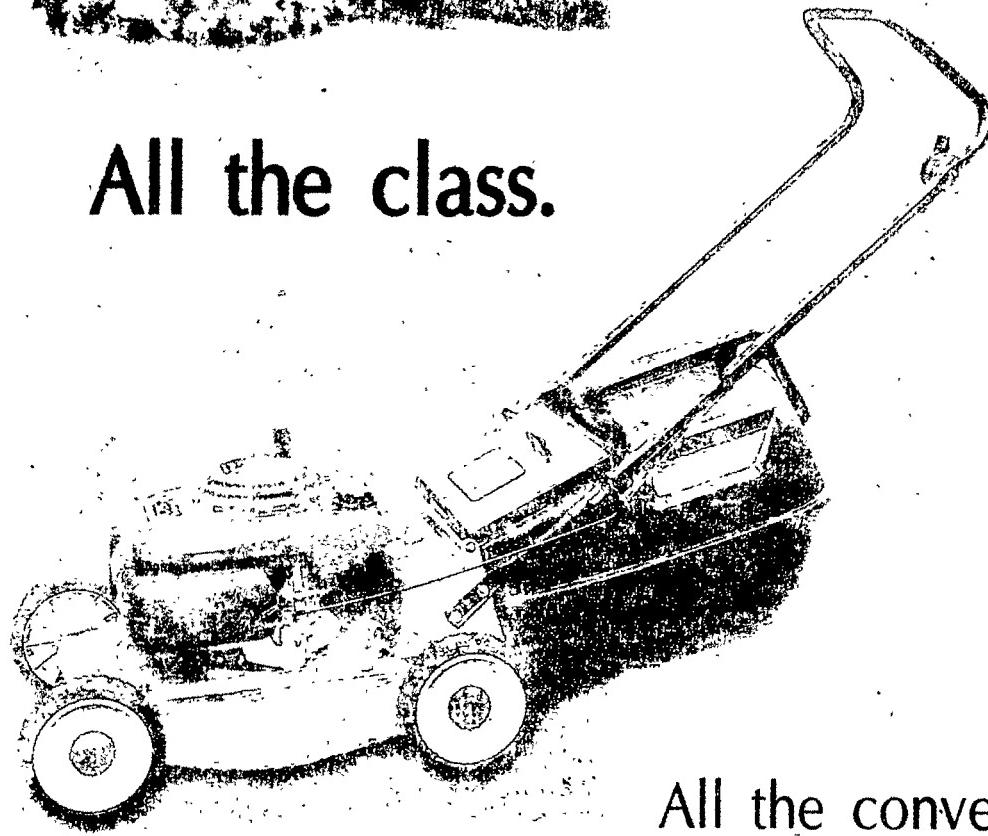
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a symposium on

gainers, losers and

development performance

symposium participants

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The problem

IF government advertisements are to be believed, we have never had it so good. Burgeoning forex reserves of over \$110 billion, an annual GDP growth exceeding eight percent, a booming IT sector, rising consumer demand, tax cuts and cheaper loans for housing and cars – suddenly India is shining. Even better, we not only seem to be moving towards a ‘normalisations’ of relations with our western neighbour, even the Indian cricket team has performed spectacularly in Pakistan, registering the first ever series win in both the tests the limited overs contest, in the process bagging both the game and hearts.

Contrast this with the situation and the national mood a few years back, in fact the first half of Prime Minister Vajpayee’s third term in office. Barely had we recovered from the Kargil fiasco when Gujarat experienced two disasters – the ‘natural’ earthquake devastating large parts of Kutch and Saurashtra and the ‘man-made’ pogrom consuming nearly 2000 members of the minority community. War with Pakistan seemed imminent, the social fabric appeared close to rupture and drought stalked large parts of the country. The NDA regime could do nothing right with many cabinet ministers trapped in scams and allegations of corruption. And the PM, for many the cementing force of the coalition, was keeping indifferent health.

There is little doubt that this is a different India. With over half the population under 30, many impatient and restless, there are few takers for the earlier shibboleths – a harking for the glories of the ‘freedom’ struggle, an all-powerful state intervening in all sectors of life and livelihood to ensure national integrity. Some of these are reflections of long term trends forcing changes in structures, rules, values and policies. Others, however, are a fallout of induced shifts in internal and external environment, more specifically the post 1990 policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization. And central to this are reflections on the economy – the growth of private enterprise, con-

sumerism, the shift in focus from the search for jobs and security to opportunity and enterprise.

Not surprisingly, claims on performance have become central to the electoral process. In fact, never before have we witnessed such intense debate on economic performance indicators, the material scaffolding undergirding the perception of national mood. After the *garibi hatao* debate of the early seventies, this is a rare situation of economists and statisticians occupying centre-stage, the contending parties and alliances putting forward contrasting claims.

Sifting out ‘reality’ from ‘rhetoric’ is rarely easy. How many of us, after all, are familiar with the intricacies of data, statistical methods and sampling design. The situation gets further confounded because of bitter disputes over the sources of data, its authenticity and so on, as also, unfortunately, the ideological orientation and party political affiliations of different experts. Recollect the fractious debate over the change in methodology by the NSS in computing poverty figures. Equally debatable are the assumptions linking economic performance indicators to people’s mood.

Nevertheless, as *The Economist*, the liberal economic weekly unapologetic about its policy bias in favour of greater privatization and globalization points out that much of the present buoyant optimism is overdone, or at least, based on hope rather than achievement. Equally, it stresses that India was not in quite such a mess a year ago as the pessimists feared.

Take, for instance, the claims of breaking through the 8% GDP growth barrier. Not only does one swallow not make a summer, the current growth rate appears high primarily because of good agricultural growth drawing on an excellent monsoon following years of successive drought. And while industrial demand has picked up, manufacturing growth rates remain low, constrained by both infrastructure and regulatory bottlenecks. Even the ‘spectacular’ performance of the services sector remains inordinately dependant on IT.

The greater apprehension, particularly in a globalized economy, relates to our ability to weather international shifts in demand and access to markets. True, the policy on economic reforms so far has been cautious, helping us avert the currency meltdown crisis which affected large parts of East and Southeast Asia in 1998. But with proper safeguards still to be institutionalised, there is little confidence that our banking and financial system can cope with the shocks of an open economy. Not many have forgotten the numerous stock market scams, the collapse of cooperative banks or that of the UTI.

Even more troubling is the situation on the labour and employment front. It is symptomatic that on this count the shining India claims are more promise about what the NDA, if voted back into power, will do than past performance. The largest employer, agriculture, has not fared well; organised manufacturing is experiencing structural transformation and even where growing, is doing so without adding jobs. Employment growth in services involves only those with formal skills and education and the informal/unorganised sector jobs, the mainstay of the less well off, offer little by way of quality of earnings and security. With public, including government, sector jobs on the decline, we are experiencing jobless growth.

The situation regarding equity – regional, sectoral, interpersonal and intercommunity – has by all criteria worsened. When read in conjunction with the decline in public services – health, education, the PDS – the poorer strata, particularly those belonging to marginal communities and in marginal regions, come across as trapped in a ‘survival’ syndrome. And though there is some concern over the ballooning fiscal deficit, the deplorable situation of state and local body finances is insufficiently appreciated, dangerous since most activities which directly affect us lie in the domain of the provinces. No wonder, the deputy prime minister on his *Bharat Uday Yatra* was

often forced to admit that the ‘shine’ dulls outside the metropoles.

The argument is not that nothing has changed, nor that successive regimes have got little right. The apprehension is that the succession of bloated claims, understandable in an election year, may be distracting attention from structural challenges that demand a creative and consistent response if India is to truly shine. No nation can for long survive with a fragile pride about either its great historical past or an enhanced reputation in the international comity based on an entry into the nuclear weapon states club. It has to ensure, not for a minority but for all, acceptable standards of human development and security.

How can, for instance, we countenance a situation of endemic and widespread malnutrition alongside a glut of foodgrains in the official warehouses. Sophistry about poverty figures (whether declining or not and at what rate) cannot hide the absence of public works programmes using the surplus foodgrain. The growth in sectarian and militant violence, much of it homegrown, in large parts of middle India better explains the feeling of insecurity. So does the expansion of mafia and criminal groups.

The challenge facing the Indian Republic is to recast and retool the nation to meet the demands of the times. There is little doubt that many of our favoured instrumentalities, rules and regulations continue to be designed to control rather than facilitate and are thus unable to engender enterprise. What we need is an inclusive public discourse that helps us debate public policy choices, not what we are currently being subjected to – a plethora of clever one-liners and dubious statistical claims.

This issue of *Seminar* attempts to debate some enduring concerns – concerns that our polity and society needs to urgently address. Otherwise, as stressed in a recent issue of *Frontline*, we will remain prisoners of ‘the feel good factory’.

'Shining' in rural India

ABHIJIT SEN

PROBABLY the most interesting feature of the forthcoming elections is that the ruling coalition has decided to contest them less on basis of new promises or vision for the future and much more on the claim that things have never been better. Whether in the jingles of 'India Shining' or '*Bharat Uday*' or in their more partisan claim of 'more in the last six years than in the past fifty', the stance is confident and borders on the audacious. If the NDA does win absolute majority as opinion polls predict, it will not only claim endorsement for its policies but also popular approval of the trajectory that the nation's polity and economy have actually taken since 1996 when the Congress last ruled or at least since

1998 when the NDA finally came to power.

The opposition has of course attempted to refute these claims. The outrage in Gujarat, the continuing threats to minorities by various factions of the *Sangh parivar* and the misuse of POTA were all highlighted in the political effort to form a secular front to restore communal and social harmony. But this effort has succeeded only partially. Since the ruling alliance has posed the choice as one of personality, with the current prime minister projected as both moderate and with a vision on development, it is the credibility of NDA claims about the economy that may well be the deciding factor.

On this some political parties, e.g. the left, have a clear position. And, to her credit, Sonia Gandhi has concentrated on unemployment and the plight of farmers in her election speeches. But many others in the Congress sing a different tune. By claiming the present to be consequence of economic policies that the Congress initiated in 1991 but which the BJP 'stole', they provide credence to claims of 'shining' and simultaneously indicate that the trajectory is unlikely to change whatever the election outcome. Along with media hype, whether on cricket, on persons entering politics, or on quarterly GDP figures, such implicit acceptance of 'feel good' is far more effective in spreading the government message than those expensive advertisements that have now stopped.

The first point to note, therefore, is that there is a vocal constituency that does believe that the economy is doing well. More importantly, this cuts across most party lines and involves belief that the 'reforms' of 1991 served them well. The BJP not only wants to appropriate ownership of this with its 'shining' campaign but also imbue it with the celebration and aggressiveness that had succeeded on Hindutva. Implicit in this is that just as with Hindutva there are inhibitions in this constituency which if turned from apology to assertion can cut the ground from the feet of the Congress. Having gone from opposing economic 'reforms' of the Congress in the last elections to taking it on wholesale in office, the strategy clearly is to take the winners on board triumphantly while leaving the opposition struggling to recapture those who lost.

The second point which follows from the above is that benefits of 'reform' have been uneven. This is, of course, quite well known to laypeople

as also to politicians who need to judge pros and cons before taking definite positions. However, politicians seek guidance on economic magnitudes just as they do psephological help. And 'reform' ideologues among economists, whether in media, business, academia or government, have always nudged policy judgement by employing spin to discount the downside and magnify gains. Moreover, since almost all of them believe in 'reform' to the point of being insensitive to its outcome, their barrage has been remarkably consistent on economics although fickle on politics.

This means that, although more confident and aggressive in presentation, the NDA's 'shining' campaign is built on economic inputs no different from those which were received by Congress and United Front when they contested unsuccessfully to retain office. If anything, the main lesson that 'reform' enthusiasts seem to have learnt from those defeats was that the data available should not demoralise decision-makers on matters that might be politically sensitive.

For example, with yield growth slowing down sharply, there was clear evidence from available data that all was not well with agriculture when the Congress and UF had gone to polls. Also, the National Sample Survey (NSS) had shown higher rural poverty in all its nine rounds from 1990-91 to 1998 than in 1989-90. But ingenious 'reformers' had sorted out such inconvenient detail by 1999. National Accounts Statistics (NAS) of 1998 had shown GDP growth in agriculture down from 3.5% per annum during the 1980s to only 2.8% during 1990-91 to 1996-97. But in 1999 a new National Accounts series was released showing 1990-97 growth of agricultural GDP to be 3.6% per annum. The 53rd round of the NSS conducted in 1997 had

shown 35.5% of rural people in poverty, up from 33.7% in 1989-90. But the NSS round conducted in 1999-00 came up with only 27.1% rural poverty.

From almost the beginning of their term of office it has been dinned into NDA ministers that things have really been rather good on such matters after 'reforms', and certainly not as bad as they might have thought while in opposition. 'Shining' is thus as much an outcome of the skill of 'reformers' to package facts attractively as it is of BJP audacity. A resulting problem though is that no one really knows the extent of 'feel good' and, even more, that NDA leaders may be going to polls actually believing such official statistics. Since agricultural production and the extent of rural poverty are among the most basic determinants of rural 'feel good', it is worth discussing the nature of available data on these, beginning with agricultural production consisting of crops and livestock.

Data on area and yield of 43 'forecast' crops are collected annually on a scientific basis and are used to compile the official Index of Agricultural Production (IAP). Firm livestock data are available only every five years from the Livestock Census and annual estimates of livestock products are based on interpolations from these using various ratios and assumptions regarding produce per animal. But virtually no reliable data is collected on actual production of many minor crops, including most fruits and vegetables. For these, production estimates are carried forward from some assumed base using information on area, seed distribution and arrivals in major markets. Farm income estimates require further assumptions regarding inputs, price spreads and losses between the farmer and final markets.

The data revisions on agricultural GDP in 1999 involved fruits and vegetables. Till then, although production of these was estimated to have grown faster than other crops, their small estimated share of only 11-15% of total crop production meant that there was no significant difference between the trend of agricultural GDP and that of IAP, based on firm production data. However, taking advantage of some concern that fruits and vegetables production was being underestimated, the 'reformers' persuaded the NAS to revise estimates very sharply upward – almost double for 1996-97. Also, since then fruits and vegetables production has been shown growing at about 4.5% per annum.

The implication of this revision, carried out with no reliable data at all, has been rather dramatic on how agricultural incomes and Indian diets are now viewed officially. Till the revision, the value of fruits and vegetables output was assumed to be only a third of that from foodgrains production. But latest GDP estimates imply that, although grown on less than a sixth of the area, fruits and vegetables now account for about the same farm revenue as foodgrains. Further, the National Accounts Statistics (NAS) also imply that farmers receive about 70% of total consumer spending, i.e. traders' margins, losses in transit and costs of transport on fruits and vegetables all add up to only 30% of what consumers pay.

If all this were true, growing fruits and vegetables now fetches well over an average of lakh rupees per hectare, and things must indeed be shining for growers. In fact, based on such understanding, the official effort today is more on exhorting farmers to diversify than to restore yield growth in crops such as cereals, pulses, oil-

seeds and fibres. However, although it is true that some horticulturists are doing rather well, NDA campaigners might be advised not to make too much of this. Not only do farmers know how much they grow and exactly what price they get, Indian consumers might be shocked to learn that the NAS now assumes that they spend *three times as much* on fruits and vegetables as they themselves report to NSS consumption surveys.

But what should really worry the NDA is that despite the creative national accounting, GDP from agriculture and allied activities has hardly grown during its period in office. At 1993-94 prices, latest NAS estimates place this at Rs 2861 billion in 1998-99, 2870 billion in 1999-00, 2859 billion in 2000-01, 3053 billion in 2001-02, 2894 billion in 2002-03 and 3158 billion in 2003-04. The 9% growth in the current year is impressive. But this is from last year's drought, and growth over the five years is only 10.4%. Since population has meanwhile increased by over 9%, per capita agricultural GDP this year is placed not even 2% higher than in 1998-99.

And, of course, matters are much worse considering only those crops whose data is firm. Although current estimates of foodgrain production for 2003-04 are a whopping 19% higher than in 2002-03, this is only 4% higher than in 1998-99; and the overall Index of Agricultural Production (IAP) has increased less than 3% between 1998-99 and 2003-04. The IAP per capita of rural population is thus actually down 6% from 1998-99 while per capita foodgrains output is down 5%.

Moreover, this is not all. The feature that distinguishes the last five years, and worries farmers most, is that farm prices have drifted relatively

lower despite low output growth. With agricultural GDP at current prices shown 27.3% higher in 2003-04 than in 1998-99 against 10.4% increase at constant prices, agricultural prices increased 15.4%. But during the same period, non-agricultural GDP is estimated to have increased 39.2% in constant prices and 69.1% in current prices, implying 21.5% increase in non-agricultural prices. The GDP estimates imply at least 5% terms of trade loss for agriculture over 1998-2004.

Again, matters might be worse since official terms of trade indices from the Ministry of Agriculture had already shown 5% decline during 1998-2002, when terms of trade from GDP estimates had shown only 2% decline. But in any case, taking terms of trade into account, the purchasing power of agricultural incomes has actually declined in per capita terms during 1998-2004 even by the optimistic NAS figures; and this decline is by more than 10% if one combines official Indices of Agricultural Production and Terms of Trade. Thus, despite some diversification, overall agricultural outcomes have been poor, both on output and prices.

As far as output is concerned, this is because rates of growth of yields per acre have declined very sharply for almost all major crops. Considering all the crops covered in the IAP, yield growth had averaged 2.5% per annum during the 1980s, dropped to around 1.5% by 1998-99, and has averaged only about 0.5% during the last five years. Underlying this are some long-term trends, e.g. the plateau reached by 'green revolution' technology and inadequate public investment since the 1980s. But matters have worsened recently on these and other fronts, such as extension and cooperative credit, because the Fifth Pay Commission bankrupted state governments:

Of course, some states have done better than others on output growth and the private sector has begun extension activities for some crops in some regions. But, with very few winners and many losers, agricultural production performance is not an aspect in which India is shining. However, the political fallout is not entirely clear since, with most states opposition ruled, the blame-game will be about Centre-state responsibility and response. And the debate is likely to be on whose incumbency hurt more, not what is to be done in the future.

On the price situation, however, the NDA is much more vulnerable. After all, it was the Centre that caved in at WTO and dismantled quotas prematurely, exposing Indian agriculture to the international price volatility that many farmers blame for their woes. And, although attractive support

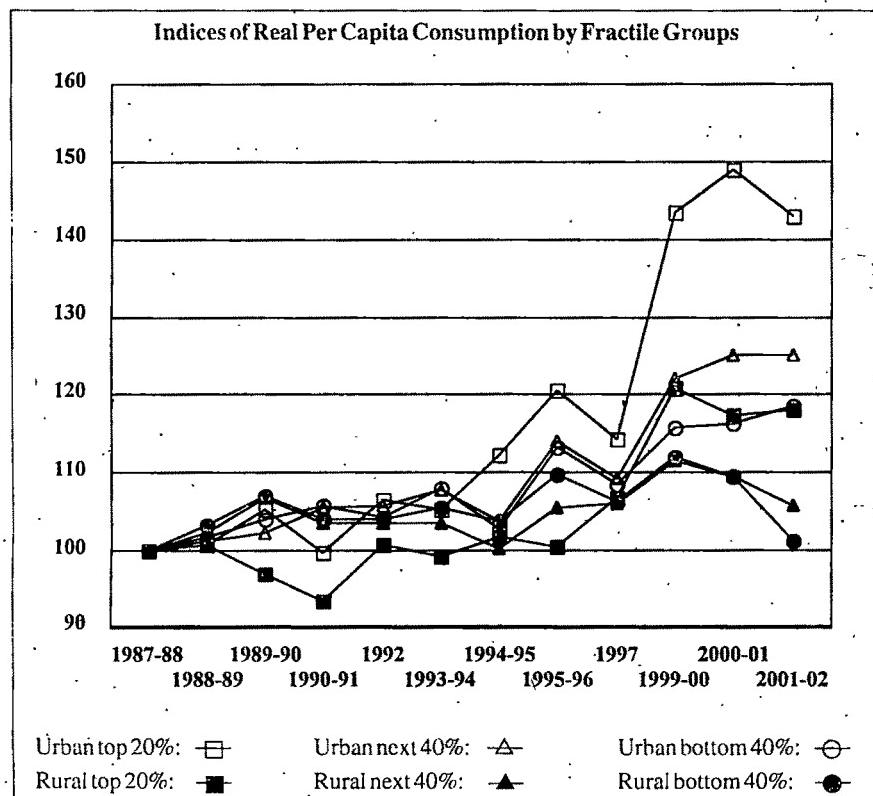
prices were announced, farmers in most regions did not actually get any price support. Moreover, contrary to recommendations of some committees to extend support operations, there are plans to halt support purchases altogether and link support prices to insurance – a misguided alternative already being piloted in some districts where Rabi arrivals will coincide with elections.

Turning to rural poverty, can this have reduced given the poor agricultural outcomes? Also, given the near vacuum on policy initiatives on agricultural production and price instability; what are the ideas to deal with this? The important aspect that needs noting in this context is that rural incomes are not all from agriculture and that fall in crop prices, although this hurts farmers, can improve conditions for those who buy food.

The ‘shining’ campaign has put particular emphasis on the achievement on roads and thus of rural connectivity. And available NSS data does show fairly massive rebound (by over 40%) in rural non-agricultural employment, particularly construction, transport and trade, during 1997 to 2001-02, after a collapse during 1990-91 to 1997. Moreover, available data on wages and prices show that the consumer price index for rural labour increased less than other price indices after 1998-99 and that real wage rates have increased. Further, rural non-food consumption is increasing whether one goes by NSS or independent data. Thus, there are clear signs of rural dynamism if one goes beyond agriculture.

However, paralleling the poor agricultural performance, there is also evidence of stagnation in agricultural employment while the number of rural workers dependent on wage employment has increased very sharply (over 45% since 1991). NSS data in fact show a doubling of current unemployment among usual rural workers over the period 1997 to 2001-02. Furthermore, although the ‘shining’ campaign has correctly identified the fairly large *antyodaya* grain supplies as a major achievement of the NDA, overall per capita cereals consumption (whether measured by availability or from NSS consumption estimates) has declined.

This coexistence of some dynamism in rural non-agriculture alongside declining agriculture makes it difficult to identify exactly what is happening to overall rural well-being. This is compounded because the only reliable source of information on this, the NSS consumption expenditure surveys, have become non-comparable. Pressure from ‘reformers’, stung by NSS results that showed increased



Note: This chart is based on NSS data. However, data for 1999-2002 used a 30/365 mixed recall while the uniform 30 day recall was used in previous years. Data have been made comparable using linking factors from those surveys where estimates were available by both recalls.

rural poverty from 1990-91 to 1998, caused a change in the nature of the questions asked in these surveys.

Some experimental surveys had shown that asking 365 day, rather than 30 day, questions on items such as clothing and durable goods throws up improved distribution and that asking 7 day questions on food returns 30% higher food consumption than 30 day questions. So, instead of the uniform 30 day recall used previously, the 1999-00 NSS questionnaire was changed to only 365 day for clothing and so on and both 7 and 30 day questions for food. Not surprisingly, this led to much lower measured rural poverty, by almost 50 million.

Since then much has been written on comparability of subsequent NSS data, and it is sufficient to note that it is now agreed that rural poverty did not decrease by anything like 50 million and that, although the proportion of poor is likely to have declined somewhat, the number of poor may actually have gone up. More importantly, it is now agreed that, properly interpreted, NSS data from 1993-94 onward show very large increase in inequalities (see chart) – across states, between rural and urban, and within urban areas. Moreover, although evidence on inequalities within rural areas is less clear, the trend towards lesser inequality that had begun in the mid-1970s with rural development programmes and extended public distribution has clearly halted.

But, consistent with the divergent indications on agriculture and rural non-agriculture discussed above, the most interesting indication from NSS data from 1993-94 to 2001-02 is that although cultivators and agricultural labourers have done badly, and the self-employed in non-agriculture have also not done well, those employed for wages or salary in non-agriculture have

done much better. In fact, salaried employment, proximity to urban growth, and the ability to migrate emerge as main determinants, not only of the ability to avoid poverty but also as sources of relative affluence. Although cultivators still dominate among the richest 20% in rural areas, the proportion among the rural rich of affluent non-cultivators with urban connections has increased rapidly.

This should interest those attempting to guess political outcomes. Although caste and religion continue to dominate networks of patronage, the combination of poor agricultural outcomes and rapid urban growth in recent years has shifted the rural balance from traditional elites towards those who can offer urban access. It is here that the BJP, traditionally much weaker in rural than urban areas, can be the biggest gainer. Rural India is definitely not 'shining'. But access to the shine that exists, which the 'shining' campaign has made even more apparent, is now through networks where that party is stronger. The moot question is whether this shift in balance merely affects how people tell outsiders how they will vote or whether this is so deep that it will actually show up in how they finally vote?

On this, NDA strategists might like to mull over the following about rural India. It remains overwhelmingly agricultural, is about to go into elections in a year after severe drought, and is being bombarded with celebrations of 'shining' without any solution being offered for what is definitely a longer-run crisis. There have in the past been only four years before the current one when national income has grown more than 8%: 1967-68, 1975-76, 1989-90 and 1996-97. These have all followed a year of drought and all except 1975-76, when Indira Gandhi declared an Emergency, were election years. The ruling party suffered losses every time.

Labour: down and out?

T. S. PAPOLA and ALAKH N. SHARMA

IT is widely agreed that India is shining but only for a small minority of around 10%, mostly consisting of the rich and higher middle class in urban areas. Are some segments of workers included in this group? What are the emerging prospects of securing employment for the large mass of the unemployed and new entrants in the labour markets? Is the quality of employment—earnings, regular availability of work, working conditions and elements of social security – of those employed improving? Are the workers' rights now better guaranteed and institutions struggling for their protection better organized?

Employment, defined as gainful work of any kind, either on the basis of self-employment or hired wage/salary basis, in production for self-use or for the market in agriculture, industry or services, in the public or private sectors and in the organized or unorganized sector, experienced a steady growth hovering around 2% per annum over a period of 30 years, 1960 to 1990. In itself this is no mean achievement if compared internationally, more so against a relatively low rate of growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of around 3.5% per annum. When compared with the labour force growth of about 2.5% per

annum, however, it fell short of providing employment for all and the magnitude of unemployment increased from around 6.5 million in 1961 to about 16 million in 1990 and unemployment rate from 3.6% to around 5% of the labour force.

The rate of employment growth declined sharply to 1.50% during 1990-92 and further to 1.07% during 1993-2000. During 1990-92, GDP growth also fell to a low of 3.4%, but deceleration in employment growth during the rest of the 1990s took place alongside an acceleration in the rate of GDP growth to 6.5%. The employment content of growth, as measured in terms of employment elasticity (ratio of employment growth rate to GDP growth rate), has been declining over the years, understandably for the reasons of technological changes, coming down from 0.61 during 1972-73/1977-78 to 0.52 during 1983/1993/94, but the decline was unusually sharp to 0.16 during 1993-94/1999-2000.

Unemployment rates, measured by various definitions of 'workers' – usual status, current weekly status and current daily status – which had shown a declining trend in earlier quinquennial periods from 1977-78 onwards, have increased. For example, accord-

ing to current daily status criterion, the unemployment rate (unemployed as per cent of labour force), which was around 8% between 1977-78 and 1983, declined to around 6% between 1987-88 and 1993-94, but then increased to 7.32% in 1999-2000.

Thus, on the employment front at least, there was no 'shine' during the 1990s. Employment growth dipped, and a higher GDP growth rate did not help in accelerating it. Instead, unemployment increased – by current daily status criterion, it is estimated to have increased from around 20 million to 27 million and by usual status criterion, from 7 to 10 million. Net addition to employment during the seven-year period 1993-2000 is estimated to have been of the order of around 21 million while the labour force grew by about 27 million, thus adding to the backlog of unemployment by six million.

The employment scene is shining, no doubt, for those who have been able to find jobs in the fast-growing information technology sector. According to Nasscom, IT now employs 770,000 persons and is likely to employ two million directly and another two million indirectly (in IT enabled services) by 2008. Impressive as these figures seem, they have to be seen against the overall size of the labour force of over 400 million. It is also worth noting, as observed by *The Economist* (21 February 2004), that the IT related employment is concentrated in a few large cities and their satellites such as Noida, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai and very few persons of rural and poor background find jobs in this sector due to a lack of requisite skills. A 'digital divide' continues and is, in fact, widening.

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It is also observed that a large majority of workers are employed in routine jobs with relatively low earn-

ings and little scope for accumulating professional skills. The few performing high-end tasks have, of course, made significant gains from the expansion of the IT sector. Another group which has gained significantly consists of government employees who not only had a large increase in their earnings as a result of the Fifth Pay Commission recommendations, but were also benefited by the recent decision to merge dearness allowance with the basic pay resulting in sizeable increase in perks and benefits and pensions on retirement. The size of this group is, however, shrinking with the government policy of downsizing.

Recent estimates from the Planning Commission, however, suggest that the process of deceleration of employment growth has been reversed during 2000-2002. During the period June 2000 to December 2002, employment growth has been over 2% per annum with an average of 8.4 million jobs added per year, as revealed by the preliminary results of the 58th Round survey of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). Encouraged by these results, the Planning Commission is now hopeful of achieving the Tenth Plan target of 10 million jobs per year with the realization of the envisaged GDP growth rate of 8%.

Doubts are, however, being expressed about the veracity of these figures, probably because the sudden turn around indicated by them is difficult to explain. Equally, it must be kept in mind that the results of the 58th Round are based only on half yearly surveys and unlike the quinquennial round the sample size is small. Hence, the results should be interpreted with caution. Firm and detailed results based on large sample survey will be available only in the 60th Round which is expected by June 2004. But the more important questions are –

where are these additional jobs being created and what is the quality of these jobs? Details about sources of employment opportunities generated are not available at present. But as was indicated by S.P. Gupta, Member, Planning Commission, while releasing the results of the survey on 19 January 2004, most of the new jobs have come from the small-scale sector.

It is, in fact, reasonable to surmise that most of the new employment that was generated during the decade of 1990s and particularly in recent years, is located not only in the small, but in the unorganized sector. Organized sector employment has experienced a virtual stagnation over the period 1994-2000 showing a growth rate of only 0.56% per annum, mainly in a few sectors – trade, hotels and restaurants, and finance and insurance, even as unorganized sector employment has grown, in fact, at a more rapid rate.

According to estimates provided by the Director General of Employment and Training (DGET), organized sector employment saw an absolute decline of 9.1 lakh during the period March 1997 to March 2002; more than half of it in the manufacturing sector. During a single year 2001-2002, organized sector employment declined by 4.2 lakh. Unorganized sector employment, on the other hand, has shown consistently higher growth than the organized sector. The share of unorganized sector employment which was estimated to be around 93% earlier should, therefore, have gone up and may further increase over the coming years.

It is well-known that quality of employment – in terms of earnings, regularity of employment, work environment and social security – vastly differs between the organized and unorganized sectors. Workers in the

organized sector enjoy better wages and salaries, job security, reasonably decent working conditions and social protection against such risks as sickness, injury, disability and death arising out of hazards and accidents at work, separations and old age. Those in the unorganized sector generally have no protection against these risks, have low earnings, often lower than the modest statutory minimum wages and have no regularity, leave aside security, of jobs. An increase in the share of unorganized employment obviously means an overall deterioration in the quality of employment. And the shedding off of jobs by the organized sector and workers rendered redundant in the process of finding refuge in the unorganized sector, implies an absolute fading of whatever little 'shine' a small segment of the workforce had in their jobs!

Even within the organized sector, an increasing number of jobs are approximating the character of those in the unorganized sector as a result of the increasing labour market flexibility in the wake of globalization. A comprehensive survey of about 1300 firms, scattered over 10 states and nine important organized manufacturing industry groups (consisting of both public and private sectors), undertaken by the Institute for Human Development (sponsored by the Ministry of Statistics, Government of India), shows that between 1991 and 1998 although the total employment increased by over 2%, most of the increase was accounted for by temporary, casual, contract and other flexible categories of workers. Several other studies at micro level also show that flexibility in the labour market increased after the introduction of economic reforms in India, and despite the existence of restrictive labour laws, the firms were able to retrench a

large number of permanent workers. In addition, many units were closed, leading to unemployment of thousands of workers.

Another dimension of deterioration in the quality of employment – in terms of low earnings, irregularity and uncertainty of work availability, poor conditions of work and lack of social protection and vulnerability to the risks and hazards – is seen in the increase in the casualization of the workforce. A majority of the workers, around 53%, still work as self-employed, mostly in agriculture, though their proportion has declined from around 59% in 1977-78 and 56% in 1987-88. Those in regular wage paid or salaried jobs continue to constitute around 14% of all workers for over two decades. This segment of the workforce has regular jobs with security, relatively better earnings and social security and can, therefore, be considered, as 'feeling good'.

But their proportion is not increasing and there is a likelihood of its decline over the coming years, as most of these jobs are in the organized sector where employment has stagnated or is in decline. On the other hand, the category of casual employment, characterized by all the vulnerabilities and risks – of irregularity and uncertainty of work, low earnings, unfair treatment by employers and lack of social protection – has steadily increased. From 23% in 1972-73, the proportion of casual workers in the total employment increased to 30% in 1987-88 and rose further to 33% in 2000.

That the casual workers are worst placed among the three categories of workers even in terms of the single indicator of income is indicated by the relatively higher incidence of poverty amongst them as compared to the other two categories. In 1999-2000, 55% of casual workers in rural

areas and 50% in urban areas belonged to households below the poverty line; the corresponding percentages for the self-employed was 22.5 and 26% and for the regular wage and salary earners 15 and 11%, respectively.

A redeeming feature in the world of casual labour, however, is seen in the trend of rising real wages during the 1990s. Real wages of casual workers in rural areas are reported to have increased at a rate of 3% per annum and of those in urban areas by 3.5% per annum. In rural areas this has been attributed to two factors that have led to some tightening of the labour markets: special wage employment programmes and relatively faster expansion of non-farm activities.

It is, however, to be seen whether these processes will receive continued impetus, particularly in view of the questionable ability and commitment of the government to expand employment programmes and in the absence of a focused policy for rural non-farm sector. Most of the rural poverty and employment programmes have been restructured in recent years. Moreover, some programmes, particularly wage employment programmes, have received lower financial allocation during recent years. For example, from 1999-2000 to 2001-2002 the expenditure on Employment Assurance Scheme and Swarna Jayanti Rojgar Yojana considerably declined, which greatly affected the creation of person-days of employment from these programmes.

The forces unleashed by technology, liberalization and globalization have adversely affected the rights of workers and their bargaining capacity vis-à-vis employers. On the other hand, there is ascendancy in the managerial rights. While the trade unions have weakened, the militancy of employers is on the rise. There are several

factors behind these developments. Unionization was largely confined to the organized sector in which the public sector accounted for two-thirds of employment. But employment in the organized sector, which constituted the base of trade unions, has shrunk. Privatization, downsizing, and resort to contingent and flexible categories of workers have all exacerbated this situation. Although the organized trade union movement witnessed a general decline, there has been an increase in the firm level unions. As a result, the federated and central trade unions have experienced further erosion in their bargaining power.

The trade unions have been further weakened by the ascendancy of managerial rights and new strategies like out-sourcing, parallel production, and so on. Apart from an aggressive shift in employment from the permanent to temporary, casual and contract employment, there has been a systematic transfer of jobs from the bargainable or unionized category to the non-bargainable or non-unionized category by several tactics such as redesignation of workers. All these developments have not only weakened the collective bargaining machinery, but in a significant number of cases led to agreements between local and plant level unions and employers which have adversely affected the interests and welfare of workers.

For example, the fear of losing jobs has impelled unions to accept cuts in salary, freezes in allowances and benefits, voluntary suspension of trade union rights for a specific period and, commitment to modernization, flexibility and action points to increase production and productivity. The weakening of the workers' bargaining capacity and rise in the militancy of employers is also captured by a significant increase in the incidence

of lockouts and a decline in the incidence of strikes. In the pre-liberalization phase – between 1976 and 1990 – the mandays lost due to strike were 54.9% while mandays lost due to lockouts were 45.1%; the corresponding figures are 39.2 and 60.8% respectively for the post-liberalization phase, between 1991 and 2000. Further, the average duration of lockouts is also considerably higher, roughly 2.5 times those of strikes.

The shift in the ideology of the state from welfarism to the neo-liberal values of market that call for labour flexibility is pushing such reforms through legislative, executive and judicial action. Unable to initiate legislative action because of constraints imposed by parliamentary democracy, the state has resorted to executive action and judicial activism for reinterpreting legal rights of labour in the light of the prevalent values. It is significant that the Parliament has so far not been able to liberalize labour legislation despite the recommendations of the Second National Commission on Labour.

But since labour is on the concurrent list of the Constitution, some of the states have issued directives to prevent or hamstring inspection of firms for compliance of the labour laws. For example, in Uttar Pradesh the labour inspectors can carry out inspection only after prior consent of an officer of the rank of Labour Commissioner or District Magistrate. Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh have also reduced the scope of labour inspection, simplified forms and exempted several establishments from the purview of labour inspection.

The judiciary too, after liberalization, has been moving with the times, albeit not in a straight line. The judicial interpretation of law in respect of compensation against death and

injury in the pre-liberal regime had created the concept of notional extension of the workplace in order to provide succor to the affected family. More recent judicial interpretations have almost done away with it. Now if a worker meets with an accident on his usual route to the workplace while going to or returning from the workplace, he will not be compensated. Few judgments delivered by the courts have gone in favour of organized labour during last 10 years or so.

The heaviest blow to collective bargaining and workers' rights was the recent judgement of the Supreme Court declaring that government employees have no legal and moral right to strike. Although this judgement was delivered for government employees in the context of the strike by the Tamil Nadu government employees, it has far reaching implications for all other category of workers, as the arguments for banning strikes seem equally relevant in their case. It goes without saying that in the absence of the right to strike, collective bargaining will lose its meaning. So far all democratic nations conceded the 'right to strike' as a necessary concomitant of collective bargaining and India, too, was no exception.

Although no enactment provided a positive right to strike, the government, the judiciary and the people at large had interpreted the provisions relating to strike in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 read in conjunction with immunities provided in the Trade Union Act, 1926 to the effect that Indian workers enjoyed the right to strike. This has also been India's position at international labour conferences. But the Supreme Court judgment on the right to strike has dealt a severe blow to workers' right to use strike as an instrument of collective

bargaining. Apart from this, the Kerala High court has banned *bandhs*, the Indian version of general strike and the Calcutta High Court has banned demonstrations in the city.

Even the consumer courts have delivered some judgments which strike at the interests of workers. For example, the telecom union in Orissa and the *mathadi* workers in Mumbai have been asked to pay damages to cover loss to the consumers. In the latter case the workers were fighting for minimum wages and the consumer in question happened to be one of the largest business houses of the city. The courts are fixing responsibility not only on organizations but also on individual employees, unions or associations' leaders/activists.

Thus, the general ideological shift towards 'neo-liberal values' in society as a whole, abetted by technological change and new trends in the labour market, have served to weaken the trade unions and considerably erode the rights of workers. A sense of resignation pervades the working class and its leadership. All these make for a situation which forces workers to accept concession bargaining that is increasingly being resorted to in the corporate world today.

From the employment-unemployment scenario outlined earlier, it is obvious that the ranks of the voiceless workers are swelling. Those in the unorganized sector have virtually no bargaining power despite the fact that a large percentage of the membership of some central trade unions comprises workers drawn from among them. In this sector, any attempt at organizing on the part of workers immediately invites managerial reprisals and the leading workers are sacked. Thus, organizing becomes too risky for those who eke out a rather precarious living. The neo-classical

figment of a trade-off between work and leisure amounts to an option between work and starvation. No wonder these workers are forced to work for long hours without minimum wages, overtime, casual or sick leave and even maternity leave for women workers. Thus, an increasing number of workers are fated to suffer from extremely poor conditions of work, low wages and no social security.

It appears that if India is shining for about 10% of its population, the proportion of those gaining from the shine is probably much smaller among the workers, around 5-6% consisting of a segment of government employees and a few occupying high-end jobs in the IT sector and managerial positions in large firms, particularly multinational corporations. If the recent estimates of employment generation on the basis of more reliable data to be available soon turn out to be correct, there may be good news for a vast mass of the unemployed and the underemployed in so far as they can expect better availability of employment opportunities. A sustained increase in job creation at the rate indicated by the limited available data would imply an employment growth that will not only absorb all the addition to the labour force but also result in a reduction in the backlog of employment. There is, however, a big question mark on the qualitative dimensions of the new jobs in terms of levels of earnings, working conditions and social protection.

All available evidence on different aspects of the labour scene suggests a likely overall deterioration in the quality of new jobs. Most of them are expected to be located in the unorganized sector which scores low in respect of earnings and working conditions. Even in the organized sector the trend has been towards increasing

casualization, contractualization and informalization in the name of labour flexibility.

The state, even though unable so far to legislate to bring in reduction in the degree of job security and compliance of labour standards, seems inclined towards emphasizing efficiency and investment at the cost of protection of labour. Trade unions, on the other hand, have waned in importance as pressure groups and lost their 'bargaining' power, partly on account of their 'own actions', but largely as a result of the entrenchment of an all pervading neo-liberal ideology in government policy, economic elite and civil society. Certain pronouncements by the judiciary have further buttressed the trend towards erosion of workers' rights.

Given these trends, what is in store for labour in 'shining' or 'likely to shine' India? There are reasons to believe that there would be more jobs created with accelerated economic growth. There would be some better quality jobs for the few with high professional skills and social mobility. However, most jobs are likely to be low-end ones with low earnings, little upward mobility and limited social security. The organized voice of and on behalf of workers is likely to further weaken, and conventional rights of the workers will get a further thrashing. This appears to be the likely scenario on the labour front in India, at least in the short to medium term. Faster employment growth may result in some tightening in the labour market thus leading to an improvement in economic dimensions of quality of work. But a reversal in the trend of social and political decline of labour that set in over the last couple of decades is unlikely without a conscious, concerted and sustained effort by political groups and civil society.

Post-reform regional variations

S. MAHENDRA DEV

THE existence of wide inter-regional variations in a vast country like India is well recognized. All the five year plans stressed the importance of balanced regional development and policies were designed to direct more investments to the relatively backward areas. Nevertheless, regional disparity continues to remain a serious problem. In the post-reform period, due to deregulation, the degree of control of the central government declined in many sectors. State governments can now take more initiatives for economic development than ever before. Also, the role of private sector is becoming more important as compared to the public sector. In the changed economic scenario, it would be interesting to examine the economic performance at state level. This

paper looks at regional disparities in important economic indicators in the post-reform period.

We first examine economic growth in the post-reform period as compared to pre-reform period.¹ Table I provides growth rates in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and per capita GSDP for two periods. It shows that in the 1980s, four states viz., Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra and Rajasthan showed higher growth than all India (col.2). The growth rates seem to be more balanced in the 1980s as some of the poorer states

1. There are a number of recent studies on regional disparities in India. Among others, see Ahluwalia (2000), Nagaraj et al (1998), Rao et al (1999), Shetty (2003), Dholakia (2003), Deaton and Dreze (2002), Dev and Ravi (2003), Bhattacharya and Sakthivel (2004).

like Bihar and Orissa also recorded more than 4% growth per annum.

At the all India level, growth rates increased by 0.8 percentage points in the 1990s compared to 1980s. Column three shows that four states viz., Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, showed more than 6% growth in the 1990s. Gujarat and Maharashtra also recorded a growth of nearly 6%. On the other hand, poorer states like Bihar, Orissa, U.P. and Assam showed low growth rates compared to all India. It may be noted that a high-income state like Punjab recorded low growth in the 1990s. Eight states viz., A.P., Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal recorded a growth of more than 4% per annum in per capita SDP in the 1990s (col 5). On the other hand, states like Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh recorded less than 3% growth in per capita SDP in the post-reform period. Among the poorer states, Rajasthan

seems to have done better. Poorer states suffer from high population growth rates and low economic growth. As a result, disparities in per capita GSDP are much higher than those for GSDP. Shetty's study (2003) shows that the regional variations across 16 states, as shown by coefficient of variation, increased from 18% in the 1980s to 27% in the 1990s. The coefficient of variation in per capita GSDP increased from 25% in the 1980s to 43% in the 1990s.

Ahluwalia (2000) argues that 'while inter-state inequality as measured by the gini coefficient has clearly increased, the common perception that the rich states got richer and the poor states got poorer is not entirely accurate' (p. 1639). It is true that rich states like Punjab and Haryana recorded lower growth in the 1990s than 1980s. If you remove this outlier, the growth rates of poorer states (U.P., Bihar, Orissa) declined in the 1990s. In the case of Rajasthan and Madhya

Pradesh there was no increase in the growth rate in the 1990s compared to 1980s. Therefore, in five major states there was no acceleration in the growth rate in the post-reform period. In contrast, acceleration occurred in western and southern states and West Bengal.

How does one explain the fact that whereas some states did experience a significant rise in their SDP growth rates in the 1990s by benefiting from economic reforms and thereby pushed up the all India average growth rate, some other states did not respond in a similar way? The answer lies partly in the initial or pre-reform level of social and economic infrastructure conducive to growth and partly in the rate of capital formation, physical as well as human, in the post-reform period.

Physical and social infrastructure is important for economic growth and higher human development. The reports of the 10th and 11th Finance Commissions provide an index of social and economic infrastructure for major Indian states. The index of social and economic infrastructure was much higher than all India in seven states viz., West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Punjab in both 1995 and 2000 (Table II). In general, there is a positive relationship between infrastructure and growth. However, there are some outliers. Punjab did not record high growth inspite of high level of infrastructure while Rajasthan registered high growth despite low infrastructure. Similarly, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have similar levels of infrastructure but the former recorded much higher growth than the latter.

Detailed data also shows that the key infrastructure sectors of power, roads, telecommunications, posts and banking are better developed in richer and middle income states as compared

TABLE I

State	Growth Rates of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and Per Capita GSDP (%)			
	G.r. in GSDP (%) 1980-81 to 1990-91	G.r. in GSDP (%) 1993-94 to 2000-01	G.r. in per capita GSDP (%) 1980-81 to 1990-91	G.r. in per capita GSDP (%) 1993-94 to 2000-01
Andhra Pradesh	5.50	5.31	3.33	4.04
Assam	3.51	2.59	1.37	0.98
Bihar	4.55	4.50	2.42	2.81
Gujarat	4.96	5.98	3.00	4.39
Haryana	6.23	5.57	3.81	3.68
Karnataka	5.16	7.92	3.20	6.41
Kerala	3.51	5.17	2.13	4.05
Madhya Pradesh	4.46	4.33	2.10	2.36
Maharashtra	5.85	5.75	3.56	4.30
Orissa	4.20	3.22	2.39	2.00
Punjab	5.18	4.96	3.30	3.01
Rajasthan	6.39	6.26	3.84	4.22
Tamil Nadu	5.24	6.04	3.80	4.99
Uttar Pradesh	4.83	5.26	2.54	3.10
West Bengal	4.60	6.88	2.41	5.32
All India	5.37	6.13	3.24	4.38

Note: For Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh the data are for the years prior to the reorganization of these states – 1993-94 and 1998-99. Growth rates are estimated by using semi-log function.

Source: Mahendra Dev and Ravi (2003).

to poorer states (see GOI, 2003). Investment generally flows to the states where infrastructure facilities are high.

Investment and capital flows: We do not have appropriate time series data on private investments in different states. Therefore, we need to look at important indicators of capital flows at a point of time towards the end of the 1990s. Ahluwalia (2000) examines the relationship between state plan expenditure as a percentage of GSDP and growth rates in GSDP. His study finds that plan expenditure as percent of SDP declined in both the better performing states as well as the poor performing ones. The lack of correlation between state plan ratio and growth rate of GSDP indicates that total investment, which includes private investment, is more important than state plan expenditure. In the post-liberalisation period, private, institutional and external investments have increasingly tended to become market determined. There is also a great deal

of interest in the pattern of investment distribution across states.

The information on per capita capital flows to different states is provided in Table III. There are significant inter-state disparities among the five indicators in the table. The per capita public and private investment in Gujarat (Rs 33,875) was 10 times more than that of Bihar (Rs 2,852) and U.P. (Rs 3304). If we take per capita plan outlay and institutional investment, the disparities are lower than those for total investment.

The per capita total credit utilization in Maharashtra was more than 20 times that of Bihar and nine times of UP. Shetty's study (2003a) shows that the credit-deposit (C-D) ratios have fallen in all regions of the country in the 1990s – the decline being much steeper in backward states and regions. For example, in the eastern region, the C-D ratios declined from 54% in 1981 to 50% in 1991 and to 37% in 2001.

The states ranking higher in respect of social and economic infrastructure could attract greater foreign

direct investment (FDI). Between 1991 and 2003, the top five states in terms of attracting FDI, viz., Maharashtra, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat, accounted for 52% of total FDI approvals in the country (Table III). Despite its reforms, Andhra Pradesh managed to attract only about 4.6% of total FDI in the country. There seems to be a positive relationship between FDI inflows and physical and human infrastructure.

The top five leading states in the selected indicators on capital flows are shown in Table IV. The table shows that Karnataka and Goa figure in four, Orissa and Punjab in three and Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and

Maharashtra in two out of five categories (GOI, 2003). Generally speaking, there is a positive relationship between higher levels of infrastructure/income and capital flows, particularly the per capita total investment. There are some exceptions like Orissa. In the case of Orissa, relatively high levels of external aid and higher levels of private investment in the power sector could be responsible for its figuring in three categories. Rajasthan, with lower infrastructure, only figures in one category. On the other hand, Andhra Pradesh appears in one category due to very high per capita level of externally aided projects (EAPs). The correlation between per capita EAPs and infrastructure/income levels is weak. It shows that there is a large scope for getting funds through additional central assistance in the form of EAPs.

Income poverty: According to official estimates, poverty declined from 37.3% in 1993-94 to 27.1% in 1999-00. It declined 10.2 percentage points over the six year period indicating a 1.7 percentage point decline per annum. Studies by independent researchers,² however, show that rates of decline in poverty during the reform period was much lower than official estimates after adjustment for non-comparability.

Deaton and Dreze show that the growth rate of average per capita consumption expenditure (APCE) during 1993-94 and 1999-00 is positively correlated with the growth in state domestic product (SDP) across states. The correlation coefficient between the two series is 0.45. They also show that the proportionate changes in poverty ratios across states are highly correlated with corresponding growth rates of APCE (correlation coefficient

2. Deaton and Dreze (2002), Sundaram and Tendulkar (2003) and, Sen and Himanshu (2003).

TABLE II

States	Index		Rank	
	1995	2000	1995	2000
Andhra Pradesh	99.19	103.3	10	9
Assam	81.94	77.72	12	13
Bihar	92.04	81.33	11	11
Gujarat	123.01	124.31	6	5
Haryana	158.89	137.54	3	4
Karnataka	101.20	104.88	9	8
Kerala	205.41	178.68	2	2
Madhya Pradesh	65.92	76.79	14	14
Maharashtra	121.70	112.80	7	6
Orissa	74.46	81.00	13	12
Punjab	219.19	187.57	1	1
Rajasthan	70.46	75.86	15	15
Tamil Nadu	149.86	149.10	4	3
Uttar Pradesh	111.80	101.23	8	10
West Bengal	131.67	111.25	5	7
All India	100.00	100.00	-	-

Source: GOI, 1995 and GOI, 2000.

0.91). The low growth states in APCE are the eastern ones (Assam, Orissa and West Bengal) and BIMARU states (Bihar, M.P., Rajasthan and U.P.). The high growth states are from the South (except Andhra Pradesh), the West (Gujarat and Maharashtra) and North-west (Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh). In fact, there is a divergence in poverty ratios and growth in APCE in the post-reform period – the poorer state's showing lower reduction in poverty.

Poverty is concentrated in a few states. The share of six states (Bihar, U.P., M.P., West Bengal, Orissa and Assam) in all India rural poor increased from 68.8% in 1993-94 to 74.4% in 1999-00 (Table V).

One consequence of economic reforms is that inequalities have increased over time. Apart from a rise

in regional disparities, rural-urban inequalities in consumer expenditure have increased. The salaries of public sector employees have grown at 5% per annum while agricultural wages grew at the rate of 2.5% per annum in the 1990s. Intra-rural inequalities have not risen while intra-urban inequalities have increased.³

Policy implications: Our analysis on economic performance of states reveals that regional disparities have increased in the post-reform period. The disparity between the group of eastern and northern states and the group of western and southern states has increased. There are bound to be disparities across

TABLE IV

Per capita flows of	Leading States in Per Capita Flows Top five among major states
Plan outlays	Goa, Karnataka, Gujarat, Punjab, Maharashtra
Public & private investments	Goa, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Karnataka
Institutional investment	Goa, Kerala, Punjab, Orissa, Rajasthan
Credit utilisation	Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Karnataka
Additional central assistance for externally aided projects	Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Orissa, Haryana

Source: GOI, 2003.

regions in a vast country like India. However, a reduction in regional disparities is important not only for raising economic growth and human development but also to reduce social tensions. What should be done to reduce regional disparities in economic performance?

A multi-pronged strategy is needed to narrow down regional disparities. First, investment should be increased in less developed states for higher growth and reduction in poverty. Public investment is crucial for raising physical (irrigation, power, roads etc.) and human (health and education) infrastructure. Resources have to be used for infrastructure from central assistance, including externally aided projects and the state's own resources. The central government's role is important in allocating more resources to the less developed states. The role of private investment has become more important in the post-reform period. Private investment will increase if physical infrastructure and skilled labour are available.

Second, fiscal management of states must improve in order to allocate more expenditure for physical infrastructure and health and education. Many state governments are fac-

TABLE III

Major States	Per Capita Capital Flows and Share in FDI: 1999/2000/2001						
	Per capita NSDP (Rs) 1999-00	Per capita public and private investment (Rs)	Per capita plan-outlay (Rs)	Per capita institutional investment (Rs)	Per capita total credit utilization (Rs)	Per capita externally aided projects (average 1997-02) (Rs)	Share in total foreign direct investment approved 1991-03 (%)
Andhra Pradesh	14715	21447	1032	910	4668	221	4.61
Bihar	6328	2852	319	546	669	11	0.25
Chhattisgarh	N.A.	12209	631	32	1803	n.a.	0.22
Goa	N.A.	56057	3423	1821	14489	25	0.34
Gujarat	18685	33875	1285	720	5827	138	6.47
Haryana	21551	9201	861	827	5098	106	1.33
Jharkhand	N.A.	9105	836	37	1759	n.a.	0.05
Karnataka	16343	24775	1499	688	6420	125	8.25
Kerala	18262	12235	710	1173	5872	19	0.53
Madhya Pradesh	10907	7287	652	725	2528	62	3.19
Maharashtra	23398	17556	1120	660	14890	52	17.44
Orissa	9162	25525	627	1049	1706	118	2.83
Punjab	23040	12688	1244	1078	7707	68	0.83
Rajasthan	12533	6763	822	914	2419	35	1.03
Tamil Nadu	19141	26292	837	709	9194	83	8.53
Uttar Pradesh	9765	3304	293	619	1638	47	1.69
West Bengal	15569	7113	710	662	3674	89	3.18

Source: GOI, 2003.

3. See Deaton and Dreze (2002) for details.

4. See Bhattacharya and Sakthivel (2004).

ing severe fiscal problems although there are signs of improvement in recent years. Third, the less developed states are facing both low economic growth and high population growth.⁴ These states have to focus on policies for reducing population.

Fourth, agriculture sector problems have to be solved in backward states. Public investment has declined as have credit deposit ratios for rural areas. There seems to be an increase in farmer's suicides. There is also a challenge of involving small and marginal farmers in diversification. Investment in irrigation and watershed development is important, particularly for dry land areas. Similarly credit, research and extension have to be improved in backward regions.

Fifth, productive employment should be generated in order to reduce poverty in low income states. Employment can be increased if economic growth is labour intensive. Development of agriculture and rural non-farm sector will improve employment and wages in rural areas. Direct employment programmes such as wage and self-employment schemes have to be effectively implemented in less deve-

loped areas. Sixth, social sector performance should be improved in backward regions. It is necessary to ensure the expansion of public services for the poor at a low cost, effective public regulation of private services like health care, and accountability of these systems, public as well as private, to the local communities. Improvement in health and education in backward regions would improve economic growth and human development.

Seventh, to improve accountability and development, there is a need to devolve more finances, functions and powers for panchayats in order to make these institutions self sustaining. Over time, decentralization would increase accountability. Governance has to be improved in less developed regions. Also, social inclusion has to be an important agenda for governments. There is a need to garner support for the reform process from wider sections of the population by encouraging participatory models of development.

To conclude, in the post-reform period, there were some improvements in indicators such as foreign exchange reserves, physical infra-

structure (like telecommunications and roads), the stock market and IT leading to prospects of an 8% growth in GDP in 2003-04. Due to these improvements, some people feel that India is shining. However, we have seen above that inter-regional, inter-class and rural-urban disparities have increased in the post-reform period. India cannot 'shine' unless we reduce these disparities through better public policies.

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TABLE V

Percentage Share of States in All India Rural Poor: 1993-94 and 1999-00

States	Share in All India Rural Poor		States	Share in All India Rural Poor	
	1993-94	1999-00		1993-94	1999-00
Bihar	20.4	20.6	Andhra Pradesh	3.0	2.9
Uttar Pradesh	21.3	21.9	Gujarat	2.3	1.9
Madhya Pradesh	8.5	11.3	Haryana	1.4	0.6
West Bengal	8.8	8.9	Karnataka	3.4	3.2
Orissa	6.2	7.2	Kerala	2.3	1.2
Assam	3.4	4.5	Maharashtra	7.5	6.5
Total of above 6 states	68.8	74.4	Punjab	0.6	0.6
			Rajasthan	3.4	2.9
			Tamil Nadu	4.9	3.9
			Other states and U.T.	2.4	1.9
			Total of above 9 states and other states/U.T.	31.2	25.6
			All India	100.0	100.0

Source: GOI, 1995 and GOI, 2000.

Shining socio-spatial disparities

K. P. KANNAN

THERE is nothing surprising if the people of India or for that matter those anywhere, feel so chuffed about the pace of their socio-economic progress that they want to show off their shining achievements. In fact, such a feeling could accelerate their quest for overall development and a due place for their country in the comity of nations. Equally, it could also turn out to be dangerous, engendering a self-deception that might ultimately undermine the required resolve to pull the country out of the morass of poverty and deprivation and all-round underdevelopment. This is something that every informed Indian needs to ponder over.

The good performance in some macroeconomic areas of the Indian economy has given rise to such euphoria that some are tempted to speak of the impending 'super power' status of the country. There is no doubt that the country has steered clear of some minefields of the international neo-liberal agenda promoted by the IMF, World Bank and the WTO such as the financial crisis experienced by a number of countries, an external debt trap, high inflation and their consequential adverse effects on the economy. There is reason to be proud of

the performance in external trade and balance of payments and an overall growth rate that has kept the pace of the 1980s. But the same cannot be said of overcoming absolute poverty and unemployment and a host of human development/deprivation indicators that have a bearing on the much-needed social and spatial adjustment (as opposed to structural adjustment) within the country.

This brief paper deals with some aspects of disparities across regions (states) as well as social groups, mainly women and those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The intent is to remind ourselves of the enormity of the problems at hand and the distance to be covered before we can be proud of a reasonable measure of achievement vis-à-vis other countries in the developing world.

The achievement in human development in India revealed through the by now popular summary measure of Human Development Index (HDI) is certainly not something that India would like to show off – a rank of 124 out of 173 countries in the year 2000. Though somewhat better than the neighbours in the subcontinent barring the shining exception of Sri Lanka, which has a rank of 89, it pales in com-

parison with China and many others in Southeast Asia. While the HDI is an indicator of achievement, the Human Poverty Index (HPI) provides a measure of deprivation. Here again India's rank of 55 out of 88 is one of the lowest, keeping company with its sub-continent neighbours and African countries. The percentage of people below the international poverty line of one dollar a day is 44% in India. It is one of the highest and its magnitude is certainly alarming. This gives India the status of having the single largest group of poor people of around 440 million out of the estimated total of 1.2 billion in the world. It is exactly double the entire population of the United States and well above the entire population of Western Europe.

These international comparisons should act as constant reminders whenever the feeling becomes 'so good' and the going 'so great'. But the distance to be covered is not just international. Within India the disparities are so great that one could speak of the existence of a Southeast Asian type of situation in some parts of the country and that of a sub-Saharan African situation in others, with the rest falling in between these two well-performing and ill-performing types. Basing ourselves on a number of indicators, the five best performing states are Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the South forming one geographical block and Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana forming another block in the north-west with Maharashtra in the middle-west.

The bottom five worst performing states – Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal – form one single large geographical block that demands a far more serious and concerted public and intellectual attention than it has received so far. One should note that

it is not only the *Bimaru* states (denoting the first four) but also Bimaru plus in which Orissa occupies a prominent place. In fact, a more detailed examination reveals that Orissa is closer to Bihar in its non-performance than to Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, which seem to show some signs of positive change.

The indicators selected (see Table I) represent four basic social security concerns, i.e., food, health, education and housing. We have examined these at four different levels. The first two composite indicators together capture all the four concerns; the next seven are general but unitary indicators to examine them individu-

ally; the next seven are intended to explicitly bring in the gender dimension and the last five to examine the performance in terms of the well-being of two sections of the population, those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who continue to be at the bottom of the social and economic ladder in Indian society. All the data refer to the 1990s or the beginning of this century.

Table I is intended to portray the extremes, which should be profoundly disturbing. The Human Development Index of Kerala in the early 1990s is closer to that of Vietnam and Indonesia (110) and at least 20 countries above that of India. The HDI of

No. Indicator	TABLE I Disparity in Performance Between the Best and the Worst Performing States	
	Best Performer	Worst Performer
1. Human Development Index 1991 (value)	Kerala (0.59)	Bihar (0.31)
2. Human Poverty Index 1991 (% of households)	Kerala (20)	Bihar (52)
<i>Indicators for all population</i>		
3. Income poverty 1999-00 (% of population)	Jammu & Kashmir (4)	Orissa (47)
4. Total literacy 2001 (% of population)	Kerala (91)	Bihar (48)
5. Ever enrolment rate, 6-14 years 1994 (%)	Kerala (99)	Bihar (59)
6. Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 births)	Kerala (16)	Uttar Pradesh (87)
7. Kutch housing 1994 (% households)	Haryana (14)	Orissa (77)
8. Households with a toilet 1994 (%)	North East region (68)	Orissa (3)
9. Households with electricity 1994 (%)	Himachal Pradesh (88)	Bihar (9)
<i>Gender sensitive indicators</i>		
10. Gender Disparity Index (value)	Kerala (0.83)	Bihar (0.47)
11. Female life expectancy 1993-97 (years)	Kerala (75.9)	Madhya Pradesh (55.2)
12. Female literacy 2001 (% of population)	Kerala (88)	Bihar (34)
13. Sex ratio, 6 yrs+ (females per 1000 males)	Kerala (1071)	Sikkim (858)
14. Infant mortality, girls 1998 (per 1000 births)	Kerala (13)	Madhya Pradesh (97)
15. Any anaemia among women 1994 (%)	Kerala (23)	Assam (70)
16. Dropout among girls, primary 1994 (%)	Kerala (-5)	Rajasthan (63)
<i>Indicators for Scheduled Castes and Tribes</i>		
17. Kutch housing 1994 (%)	Haryana (24)	Orissa (87)
18. Households with a toilet 1994 (%)	North East region (67)	Orissa (0.7)
19. Households with electricity 1994 (%)	Himachal Pradesh (84)	Bihar (4)
20. Overall literacy 1994 (% of population)	Kerala (78)	Bihar (28)
21. Ever enrolment rate, 6-14 years 1994	Kerala (97)	Bihar (45)

Source: Indicators 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, and 12 are from Government of India (2002). Planning Commission, *National Human Development Report 2001*. Indicators 11, 13, and 14 are from Preeti Rustagi (2003), *Gender Biases and Discrimination against Women*, SWDS and UNIFEM, New Delhi. The remaining indicators are taken from A. Shariff (1999), *India Human Development Report*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. The Union Territories and Delhi and Goa have been excluded from this analysis.

Bihar is closer to the bottom six of the total of 140 countries in 1990. In fact, there were only six countries, all in Africa, that were closer to or less than the HDI value of Bihar. The internal disparity is sharply portrayed by the fact that Bihar's attainment is only half that of Kerala. Examining the Human Poverty Index, which is a measure of deprivation, the disparity is sharper with Kerala indicating one-fifth of its population as deprived, whereas in Bihar the proportion is more than two-and-a-half times that of Kerala.

A far starker picture emerges when we examine the unitary indicators that depict the basic socio-economic condition of the people. Income poverty in the worst performing state of Orissa is 12 times that of the best performing Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In fact, the five best performing states fall in a range of 4% in J&K to 12% in Kerala whereas the figure ranges from 36% in Sikkim and 47% in Orissa with Bihar, MP and Assam coming in between. These two sets of states represent the two ends of the poverty spectrum.

Housing perhaps represents an important dimension of human dignity and the internal spatial disparity could hardly be worse. Orissa has 77% of households with *kutcha* housing, i.e., more than five times that of the best performing Haryana. But a more basic and pointed indicator of human dignity is the availability of a toilet. Compare the disparity between 3% of households with a toilet in Orissa with that of 68% in the North East states. Electricity, a modern basic amenity, is surely an indicator of the quality of living. Himachal Pradesh literally shines at 88% while Bihar dims at 9%, i.e., just about one-tenth of that achieved in the former.

Gender sensitivity is generally perceived to be a weak point of Indian

society, especially in the countryside. But that would perhaps appear a sweeping statement to make when one looks at the spatial disparities. Women's life expectancy in Kerala is 76 years, not only comparable to those in developed countries but also well above that of men by 4 to 5 years. Punjab is a distant second with 69 years. But the worst performing Madhya Pradesh has just 55 years, i.e., 20 years lower than that of Kerala. In fact, the worst performing states of MP, UP, Orissa, Assam and Bihar show a range of only 55 to 58 years compared to the best performing ones between 65 to 76 years.

One basic and robust indicator of social development is the ability of a society to reduce the probability of death of infants before they attain age one. The disparity between the best performing Kerala (16) and worst performing Uttar Pradesh (87) is more than five times; the latter represents one of the highest rates in the contemporary world. Here again, a far more disturbing picture emerges when we look at girl children. The worst performing Madhya Pradesh records an infant-girl death rate of 97, seven times more than that of Kerala. Similarly, the disparity in female literacy is also much higher than in overall literacy. The wide disparity in dropout rates of girl children in primary school and in the incidence of anaemia are also alarming, to say the least.

By all indications, the socio-economic status of those listed under Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC and ST) is at the bottom of the Indian society. But here again there are significant spatial variations. Based on the availability of data, we have selected two sets of

indicators that emphasise the dimension of human dignity, i.e., the quality of housing and access to basic education. The disparities here are so stark that one cannot now make a sweeping statement about the condition of SC and ST population across the entire length and breadth of this country.

Hardly one per cent of SC and ST households in Orissa have a toilet while the figure is a truly remarkable 67% in the North East region. 87% of households in Orissa live in a *kutcha* house while only 24% do so in Haryana; the disparity is more than three-and-a-half times. In the case of electrification of houses of SC and ST population, Himachal Pradesh again shines with 84% while it is the turn of Kerala to shine in the case of literacy with 78% compared to a mere 28% in Bihar. As in the case of literacy, so in the case of school enrolment with Kerala recording a remarkable 97% compared to 45% in Bihar.

Taking all these 21 indicators, we have identified states that figure at the top five and bottom five to indicate 'best' and 'worst' performances in a comparative setting. The ranking here indicates the overall ranking (see Table II). The number of indicators in which the identified states score is given in brackets.

A visual representation would perhaps convey the reality more graphically (see map). This ranking, albeit preliminary and only indicative

TABLE II

Best Performing and Worst Performing States in 21 Indicators			
Rank	Best	Rank	Worst
1	Kerala(19)	1	Bihar(19)
2	Himachal Pradesh(13)	2	Orissa(14)
2	Punjab(13)	3	Uttar Pradesh(12)
3	Tamil Nadu(12)	3	Rajasthan(12)
4	Maharashtra(9)	4	Madhya Pradesh(11)
5	Haryana(8)	5	West Bengal(7)

of the 'best' and the 'worst' should provoke a more nuanced investigation of the underlying causes and consequences. However, several comments come to mind.

First, the best performers constitute only about a quarter of the Indian population whereas the worst performers account for more than half of the total. Unless the latter improve rapidly in terms of basic socio-economic development, the Indian averages will continue to be on the downside. When one examines the share of SC and ST population among the best and the worst, the picture is even more disturbing with the worst performers accounting for 58% while the best one just for 20% of the country total.

Does that mean states with a higher share of the SC and ST population perform badly? There is hardly any supporting evidence for that. Himachal Pradesh, one of the best performing states, has around 30% SC and ST population which is close to that of Rajasthan and West Bengal, two worst performing ones though

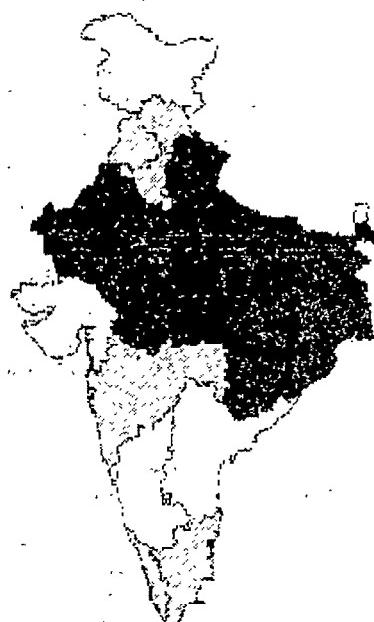
less than that of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In fact, the share of SC and ST in Punjab (28%), another best performing state, is much more than that of Uttar Pradesh (21%). Clearly the issue is not one of population share. In fact, some states in the North East region such as Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland with a very high share of ST population have a high achievement record in Human Development Index, literacy and the status of women. It is quite possible that the achievements are related to their historical access to resources along with a high degree of autonomy in affairs of state that shape public policies.

tive backwardness of the state merits detailed investigation.

Albeit to a lesser extent, the same may be said about Maharashtra. While it certainly ranks as a best performing state, it has three scores in the league of worst performing ones out of which two are on account of its poor performance in SC and ST indicators. Although the overall ranking of Haryana is below that of Maharashtra, it has two scores (out of the five) in best performance in SC and ST indicators compared to one for Maharashtra.

The best performing states are not without their share of blemishes. For example, Kerala has the highest rate of unemployment in the country, howsoever measured, mainly the educated unemployed. In Punjab and Haryana the record vis-à-vis gender sensitivity and literacy is not in consonance with the achievement in many other areas listed here.

The picture of socio-spatial disparities along with the absolute levels of deprivation is not one that will, or should, make any Indian feel good or proud. There is no need to be apologetic about achievements here and there and the zest to celebrate it if celebration is due. Some of these achievements are the result of cumulative efforts over a long period with active state policies and/or interventions, be it in the creation of a pool of world class computer software experts, ready availability of scientists, technologists and managerial professionals or competitiveness in pharmaceutical and steel manufacturing. The absence/inadequacy of state policies and programmes should surely count for the dismal record and disparity in eliminating hunger and deprivation and providing a modicum of socio-economic security to half the population. One can only feel so bad when one is asked to feel so good.



The best performing █ and the worst performing █ states in 21 indicators of socio-economic development

The future of indigenous peoples

DEV NATHAN

THE indigenous peoples or adivasis in India have not fared well in the area of poverty reduction. The incidence of poverty was higher among adivasis in 1999-2000 at 44%, while that among 'others' (i.e. non-adivasi, non-dalit) was 16%. Between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, while the poverty ratio among dalits fell from 49% to 36%, and that of 'others' (non-dalit, non-adivasi) even more from 31% to 21%, that of adivasis fell from 51% to just 44% (Antony, Dayal and Karan, 2004, p. 2). Whether in the incidence of poverty or the reduction in its inci-

dence, the adivasis are clearly doing much worse than the rest of the Indian population.

It almost goes without saying that the condition of the adivasis is more distressing in various other respects, whether health or education, with adivasi women faring even worse. The only area where the adivasis are over-represented is in the category of 'internally displaced people'. Though under 8% of the population, they constitute at least 55% of displaced people (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2004, p. 2).

This condition of indigenous peoples is not peculiar to India. Reviews across Asia (IFAD, 2003) and Latin America (van Genugten and Perez-Bustillo, 2001) both show that the incidence of poverty among indigenous peoples is much higher than among the rest of the population.

The indigenous peoples in different parts of Asia face some problems in common. Consequently, in the rest of this paper there will be reference to indigenous peoples not only in India but also in other countries of Asia.

The question of development is one of political economy; it is also one of democratic rights. One of these rights, whether stated or not, is that of a community, people or individuals to be referred to by a name that has dignity. Dignity is different from honour, in that the latter establishes inequality (if all get an honour, then it has no meaning) while the former is democratic – all can have dignity (Taylor, 1994). In the pre-colonial period, indigenous peoples were called by various pejorative names – ‘black barbarians’ and ‘white barbarians’ in China, or *mleccha* in India. They were generally considered outside the pale of civilization, not having a different civilization. Civilization and indeed the cultivation of a moral sense was supposed to be predicated upon the destruction of the indigenous peoples and their ways of life. They were considered to have no moral sense, not with a different moral sense.

As with movements of other oppressed peoples, the indigenous peoples’ movements have also included the demand to be referred to by non-pejorative terms. As they have developed, terms like ‘tribal’ have become pejorative in connotation. There is a difference between indigenous peoples and those living in state societies, but the difference is given a pejorative

connotation by certain terms like ‘tribal’ or even worse, ‘primitive tribal group’ (the official Indian term for hunter-gatherers).

It is in the spirit of using terms that are considered to have dignity that the now internationally common term ‘indigenous peoples’ is used. Indigenous peoples in Asia are now referred to officially by a number of designations – scheduled tribes in India, national minorities or minority nationalities in China and Vietnam (though those terms can also refer to other minorities like Muslims or Tibetans in China), hill tribes in Thailand. What is common to these communities is that they have generally been outside the ambit or only loosely incorporated under the pre-colonial states of Asia. Generally populating hill-forest regions, they have often been on the borders.

Their production systems ranged from hunting gathering in some cases to swidden agriculture, combined with some terrace cultivation. Production was largely of the extensive rather than intensive type, with few external inputs in cultivation. Human labour was the main external input; there was little of animal power in production. Trade was carried on in order to acquire goods that could not be locally produced like iron or salt. There were forms of individual or family property combined with community management of parts of the land. Class differences were not particularly sharp.

Gender inequalities existed at various levels, but did not constitute full-blown patriarchy. Even matri-lineal communities privileged men in community and more so in household decision-making. The struggles to establish gender inequalities were often accompanied by extensive forms of violence against women (Nathan, Kelkar and Yu Xiaogang, 1998) in the

form of denunciation as witches (*dain*, *toni* in Jharkhand or Chhattisgarh in India) or keepers of evil spirits among the Naxi in Yunnan, China and various Tai-speaking communities across Southeast Asia).

Most were not quite acephalous (or headless) communities, but where chiefdoms did exist they did not have standing armies or regular bureaucracies. Since class differences were low and the people armed, this made them formidable in their resistance to attempts at state rule, whether by the pre-colonial or colonial states.

The post-colonial states, as expected, retained these indigenous peoples within their boundaries. Particularly where they were on the borders of a number of countries, the post-Second World War decolonization led to many movements of these indigenous peoples for independence. The region encompassing the border areas of China, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam has been one vast region of continuing conflict. The late 1990s separation of East Timor from Indonesia is one example of a successful struggle of indigenous people’s for independence.

But conflicts have continued even within these countries. India has witnessed struggles for the formation of separate states by various indigenous peoples, starting with Meghalaya in the North East, to the more recent formation of Jharkhand or Chhattisgarh in the central Indian belt. Similar in nature are the autonomous regions of China. The Indian states and the Chinese autonomous regions share a characteristic of substantial control over revenue and expenditure. This, as in the Indian states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, would enable them to utilize local revenues locally instead of their being exported to other capitals.

The question of self-determination of indigenous peoples can be seen from the above examples to carry two possibilities – either that of independence, achieved only in the rare instance of East Timor, or that of the formation of a state or autonomous region with substantial revenue powers. This puts in place two critical factors in development. First, local revenue can be used locally, for infrastructure or whatever, but in any case not becoming a drain from the economy. Second, it sets up a state with which the indigenous people can in some sense identify. Ethnically the state is not alien, as was for instance Assam state to the Khasi and Garo of Meghalaya, or Bihar state to the Jharkhandis.

There, however, is yet another dimension to self-determination, that of the ownership of resources, particularly forests. The colonial state invariably appropriated forests as state property, and post-colonial states continued in the same vein. Community lands, including forests, were taken over as state property. Timber, minerals and other useful products were monopolized by state ownership and the incomes used for accumulation by the ‘national’ capitalist classes and their states. In the guise of ‘national’ or ‘public’ interest even privately-owned lands were taken over by the states.

Along with the above, the administration of these regions turns the indigenous peoples into second-class citizens. They are unique in being subject to the legally arbitrary rule of forest department officials, who unlike other officials also have the power of the police and judiciary. This is not only a denial of the human rights of indigenous peoples but also affects their economic capacity, as the indigenous peoples are turned into interlopers on their own lands and are forced to pay various extortions to forest

department officials in order to carry on their day-to-day economic activities.

The above extreme forms of exploitation and denial of human rights of the indigenous peoples has provided the base for various demands for separate states of the indigenous people’s regions, like the recently formed Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The expectation is that this would lead to a devolution of revenues, in the manner that is otherwise achieved in China by the devolution of various taxes to the county and township levels.

the state often steps in to determine the use of these forests, supposedly in the ‘national good’. The Supreme Court of India and the central government of China both instituted ‘logging bans’ in the late 1990s as measures of environmental protection or flood control. They can only be described as a form of eco-colonialism. Having transformed the lowlands in the manner that maximizes current income, the upland peoples are being asked to sacrifice any income they might get from the forests in order to preserve nature and the environmental balance.

Along with the devolution of tax revenues it is also necessary to reform the property rights systems in forests. To enable the indigenous peoples to resolve some of the acute questions of poverty, the right to manage the forests and to sell various forest products needs to devolve onto the local communities. This would require a change in the nature of the forest department from being a manager of forests to becoming a provider of technical services on forestry. This is being attempted in Nepal, where the village community now substantially manages the forests, and the forest department merely provides technical and other facilitation, as is the case with say agricultural departments, and is no longer the manager of forest lands. Further, it is also necessary to acknowledge the labour and other management contributions of the upland, indigenous peoples in supplying various environmental services and products like hydrological regulation and biological diversity.

These environmental services and products are now taken free from the indigenous peoples. Even where indigenous peoples do have property rights over these resources (as in North East India where, other than in Assam, most forests are community or privately owned, or in Yunnan, China)

As opposed to such forms of eco-colonialism it would be better to provide incentives to the indigenous peoples to provide the quantities and qualities of environmental services that are required for the national or global good on the basis of compensation for these services. Accepting their property rights over these resources as including the right to manage them, and enabling the indigenous peoples to sell these products and services, would have the effect of linking improved livelihoods in the uplands with an increased supply of needed environmental services and products. In a number of instances in both China and Nepal, upland communities are now being paid or otherwise compensated for the supply of water of required quantity and quality to lowland cities. This, of course, has for long been a feature of Switzerland, where the mountain cantons own and sell water to downstream users.

These questions of property and human rights and the resulting extreme poverty lie at the heart of the sustained support given by indigenous peoples to the various peasant insurgencies. The formation of separate states may resolve some issues of devolution of revenues but not that of property rights of the indigenous

peoples. This is seen in the instance of Jharkhand, where the new government continues with the earlier Bihar policy of replacing what little community management of forests there is, as in the khuntkatti areas, with the so-called Joint Forest Management financed by the World Bank,¹ forcing the state into the process. This retrograde process is occurring even in Uttarakhand, where the van panchayats are being supplanted by World Bank-financed JFM institutions (Madhu Sarin, 2001). A resolution of indigenous people's rights to their ancestral resources is something without which no lasting peace can be instituted in the uplands of Asia, which are the sites of various uprisings.

In India, an important measure that promises to accept adivasi property rights over the natural resources they manage, and on which they depend, is the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act or PESA, as it is popularly called. Even the partial measures of PESA have barely been implemented; and so far it remains only a promise of adivasi self-rule (Pradip Prabhu, 2004).

Reports indicate that the Government of India is considering allocating areas of forest land to corporations to undertake investments that could come in under the Clean Development Mechanism and other similar international instruments. This would only result in further displacing of indigenous peoples. Instead, what the indigenous peoples should demand, and all democratic-minded persons should support, is that the indigenous peoples be allowed to carry out the needed forest restoration or development for the above purposes. Such a proposal has been made

by Poffenberger et al (2003) in a study based on Adilabad, Andhra Pradesh.

In the village of Powerguda in the above district, a diesel substitute, pongamia oil, is being produced and used to power electricity generation. This technology was developed by the Indian Institute of Science (IIS), Bangalore. It is being managed locally by the women's self-help groups (SHGs), who have even sold the carbon saved. Though this is a small step, it shows what can be achieved. Such measures need to be built upon to enable indigenous peoples' livelihoods to be linked to improved forest condition.

While promoting such schemes of community management of forests, there has been a tendency to exclude women from the decision-making process. While some JFM rules, e.g. in Himachal Pradesh, stipulate that every adult is a member of the JFM assembly, this is not the case all over. Moving away from the so-called head of household to the equality of adult individuals is a necessary step in democratizing community management. Further, measures such as closing community forests for collection of fuelwood and other such products, disadvantage the poor and women in particular (Madhu Sarin, 2003). These issues need to be addressed again, as attempted in Nepal, first in an IFAD project and now as national policy, by allotting dedicated patches of forest to groups of poor women to manage (Nathan and Shrestha, 2004).

Such measures of devolution and increased role of markets have been seen to foster individualization/privatization of access to productive resources (Nathan, Kelkar 2003). These are occurring all across indigenous people's territories in Asia. Carried out in an ad hoc or laissez-faire manner, they disadvantage women

and other weak and poor sections of the indigenous peoples. These processes of transition in communal properties need to be studied and regulated based on democratic principles of equality of adult citizens. For example, land could be (*i*) allotted to each adult member of the community; (*ii*) the individuals have rights to manage the land and acquire the residual income from such efforts; and (*iii*) the rights to land only be usufruct, with the individual who wishes to leave the land, say to migrate, being compensated for improvements made, while the land reverts to the village.

Such an orderly process of allotment of communal land could also make provision of public lands for preservation of locally critical environmental services, like watershed protection, while provision of external environmental services would be through trade/compensation mechanisms.

Indigenous peoples have moved into new modes of economic existence – to maximizing income, rather than meeting a more or less fixed basket of needs. New needs have arisen (modern education, healthcare, entertainment, and so on) and modes of production have changed. Aspirations have also changed and increasingly affect economic behaviour. It is not only that the young do not want to be as their parents were, but the parents too do not want this. As Dipankar Gupta (2003) points out, we cannot any more talk just of needs but must take into account aspirations, which have been substantially changed by globalization.

Women have internalized these changes more than men, perhaps because of their responsibility for household and childcare. New systems of community management are needed to take care of these shifts in a way that

links effort with reward. While recognizing the need to make 'men more responsible' it is also necessary to empower women, through individualized rights to resources, in order to improve household well-being.

The indigenous peoples have their own ways of suppressing women, often involving violence. Whether as dain, tonhi, or in some other form there is an ongoing violence against women, as part of the process of establishing or strengthening forms of patriarchy. Opposing such culturally-bound forms of oppression and violence is part of the process of further democratizing indigenous communities themselves.

Changes in production systems, whether horticulture, terracing or small-scale irrigation development, all require investment. Some of this, as in the case of small-scale irrigation, is clearly a matter of public investment. But besides such public goods, even investment on private lands would require a substantial measure of public investment. Given that large sections of the indigenous peoples are below the poverty line, they do not have the needed surplus to finance the investments in developing production. For instance, horticulture development requires using labour, while income would be forthcoming only after a gestation period of a few years. If this labour were not compensated it would be difficult, if not impossible, for such farm households to make the transition to a higher income-earning agriculture.

As repeatedly noted, the indigenous peoples, virtually everywhere, face the problem of being politically marginal in the states to which they belong. Consequently, they do not command the share of national investment resources that more politically important groups do. This conse-

quence of political marginality needs to be balanced by money from international sources.

There are many fundamental issues of property rights, due process of law, even of nomenclature, to be resolved if indigenous peoples are to get a proportional or due share of national and global development.

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Is civil society the panacea?

ASEEM PRAKASH

CIVIL society is the realm where election promises are made and the imagery of voters harnessed. Nehru's discourse of a secular and modern India, Indira's promise of a poverty free (*garibi hatao*) India, BJP's assurance of ushering in a Hindutva inspired social order and turning India into a superpower by 2020 are all invoked in civil society. Similarly, social reaction against caste oppression, elite-centric development and state violence is also articulated in civil society.

More important in the present context, is that the dominant discourse assigns a primacy to the institutions of

civil society in planning, implementing and monitoring development. The proposition is that the entire range of the state's function has either to be privatised or gradually transferred to civil society institutions (read NGOs) because the centralised states have become much too unwieldy, corrupt and unaccountable. The developmental initiatives routed through the institutions of the civil society promise to make the process more 'inclusive' and 'empowering'.

The claim is that the gradual movement towards this model has helped the Indian economy achieve a

shift from a 'Hindu' to 'Hindutva' rate of growth.¹ This rate of growth has, at best, put more shine in the India of the 8-10 per cent of the total population constituting 'the great Indian middle class'. This class of people is usually well educated, generally located in urban areas, owns property or commands skills that have value in the market-driven economy and largely comes from the upper castes. The India of the 90%, when witnessed from the vantage point of the wage labour market, experience increasing job insecurity, casualisation of labour process and a near collapse of the collective bargaining strength of labour vis-à-vis capital.

Geographically, this has meant inter and intra regional disparities and a widening developmental chasm between urban and rural India.² Socially, it has led to greater inequality between and within social groups, insecurity for the minorities, a spurt in crime against women in the cities where the economic growth is most prominent, escalation of violent reaction of upper castes against the democratic demands of lower castes, and so on.

Most analysts concur that civil society comprises of diverse social collectives. It is an aspect of our social and political reality that provides a space between the family and the state/market³ for translating individual consciousness into collective consciousness. Most commentators locate civil

society either as a necessary part of a democratic and secular state trying to protect the interests of the citizens/members or as standing against and outside the structures of state registering protest against wrong practices/policies of the latter.

Despite differences, both schools tend to treat civil society as an ideal type model. Hence they include certain social collectives in society and overlook the rest which may not make sense through the vantage point of their theoretical framework. Instead we argue that a specific interface between politics, society and economy generates issues of diverse nature, in turn giving birth to corresponding social collectives in the realm of civil society for taking up the cause and mediating between the family and the state/market. Crucially, not all of them may necessarily be open and secular in nature.

Further, the space in civil society is gradually being vacated by collectives rooted in social justice and equality and occupied by those whose capacity to pursue the same is restricted. Let us discuss the collectives that have lost their emancipatory sheen.

Trade unions (TUs) are an excellent platform for organising labour against capital on a secular and class identity. Initially in India, the capital-labour relationship was marked by a paternalistic attitude of the state (the state knew more about workers' needs than workers themselves) which appropriated the 'union voices' for the purpose of rapid industrialization with minimum industrial strife. This led to labour

that feeds into the reinvention of India into a hierarchical social and economic order as per the dictates of Vedic Brahmanism.

3. The commentators giving primacy to market forces consider it as the space between family and the market, whereas commentators giving primacy to the state treat it as a space between family and the state.

attempting to recompose itself by breaking free from the dominant trade unions, particularly the Congress led Indian National Trade Union Congress. Two new trades unions—Bhartiya Mazdoor Sabha and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions—saw an appreciable increase in their members by focusing on growing unemployment and industrial stagnation often resulting in low wages and bonus cuts.

Capital as represented by the state chose to decompose the working class movement through imposing a national emergency and banning all strikes along with lowering the rate of bonus. The crisis in the economy deepened. The working class once again sought to recompose itself by aligning with several local 'independent' unions, particularly in western India, and new trade unions affiliated to regional parties. These unions strongly competed over enrolment with traditional party affiliated trade unions. Finally, the most significant assault of capital on the power of the working class was the adoption of IMF and World Bank inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), ostensibly to overcome the immediate financial crisis and to restructure the state controlled regime which had apparently outlived its historical utility.⁴

The stabilization and structural adjustment programmes (SAP) led to demands for increased labour market flexibility, especially employment flexibility, resulting in mandatory provisions of voluntary retirement schemes, hire and fire polices or closure of loss-making industrial units. The recent 2nd National Labour Commission also endorsed this shift. Jan Breman's recent work documents the

1. One of the major planks of the 'feel good' campaign launched by the BJP is the apparent surge of economic growth that the country has witnessed under the NDA regime. The BJP newsletter describes it as 'Hindu' to 'Hindutva' rate of growth, apparently referring to slow rate of growth of 3.5% in earlier decades in comparison to the growth of 8.4% achieved in the second quarter of the current financial year (*BJP Today*, 1-15 February 2004, 13(3)).

2. This lopsided growth itself perfectly fits into the phrase—Hindu to Hindutva rate of growth. The latter perhaps indicates a planned process

4. The validity of this is most eloquently contested by C.P. Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh, *The Market That Failed* (New Delhi, Left World, 2000), 31-40.

demise of trade unions in the cotton textile mills of Ahmedabad which resulted in a loss of a platform for secular class mobilisation and created a fertile space for violent right-wing communal mobilisation.⁵

Instead of a state that once negotiated and composed/recomposed labour, now capital negotiates with the working class directly. The response to this shift, however, remains muted because of the functional weaknesses of TUs. Even in their heyday, the TUs restricted themselves to plant level demands and rarely addressed the larger issues pertaining to social relations of production. Further, their efforts were overwhelmingly concentrated in the organised sector of the economy comprising a mere 8% of the total workforce in the country.

Presently, the SAP state policy discourse is dwindling the membership base of TUs while leaving them politically impotent to oppose such policy discourse. Since states have to compete with each other to attract foreign investment, thereby requiring fulfilment of the neo-liberal conditions (SAP), trade unions affiliated to the ruling political parties are usually instructed to avoid launching any militant agitations.⁶ In the present political economic scenario, TUs are unwilling to organise workers in the informal sector and their presence in the organised sector of the economy is getting increasingly marginalized. This space in the unorganised sector is now increasingly being occupied by apolitical NGOs. Though there are a few inde-

pendent unions working for the cause of unorganised labour.

The emergence of cooperatives in India can be located in the backdrop of democratic socialism and a welfare state. They emerged as a hybrid coalition of rich, middle and intermediary peasant castes, small landholders and agricultural labour in service of the welfare state. Cooperatives also facilitated the heralding of a 'passive revolution' (Gramsci's notion interpreted for welfare state policies) in India presided over by the state. This coalition became powerful in the green revolution states during the 1960s and 1970s and later spread into other areas. Soon these institutions were taken over by the rich and entrenched, a natural outcome of a multi-class alliance devoid of a 'political' grounding. This inherent weakness in their structure resulted in a reproduction of the same social and economic relations.

The entrenched and dominant sections that controlled the cooperatives were also successful in obtaining dual and apparently contradictory benefits. They both wanted to trade and earn profit through the market as also wanted an increased surplus with the help of state subsidies. In an attempt to acquire legitimacy for the latter they transformed themselves into a powerful political force by articulating a rural urban divide, contending that since rural India was ignored at the expense of urban India it was the moral duty of the state to subsidise 'development' in rural areas. Thus, cooperatives failed in catering to the universal interest. However, the present policy discourse has made their ideology of 'passive revolution' irrelevant and hence resulted in a loss of state patronage.

When people-centric demands were articulated through various social movements in the 1980s, there was a

glimmer of hope for a vibrant civil society. These formations focusing on environment, livelihood, women's issues and so on were regarded as harbingers of change. They sought to reorient state attitude, polices and programmes away from an elitist and gender-insensitive frame, to a people-centric and gender-responsive model. In the process, these movements also challenged the developmental ideology as conceived by the postcolonial Indian state.

However, in a few years these movements started losing their sheen. The most significant movement(s), namely the environment movements that have explicitly challenged the mainstream development framework, failed even during the height of the struggle to present an alternative development model. Their efforts were limited to working with people, understanding their problems and translating it into a Weberian language for policy intervention. Consequently, they were unable to develop requisite ideological clarity for resolving the class contradiction between the various stakeholders in the movement. This gradually resulted not only in a fragmentation of their support base but an acceptance of right-wing politics by their members. Finally, the movements were unable to develop leadership from within their stakeholders, the reliance on an external socially sensitive middle class gradually eroding their legitimacy.

The present development discourse of 'good governance' assigns a primary role to the institutions of civil society (read NGOs) in conceiving, planning and monitoring development. This has resulted in a proliferation of NGOs working on a wide range of developmental schemes. NGOs, however, have miserably failed to usher in a regime of empowered and

5. Jan Bremen, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2002, 36(16), 1485-1488.

6. See Aseema Sinha, 'Ideas, Interests and Institutions in Policy Change' in Rob Jenkins (ed) *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics Across Indian States* (New Delhi, OUP, 2004), 84-85.

inclusive development. The reasons are both structural as well as functional. The former entails that civil society institutions do not have to evolve as per the interaction of society, polity and economy but are artificially created from above. This in turn also implies that the state and its officials are corrupt, unresponsive and unaccountable and hence should transfer their duties to institutions, created by them yet outside their administrative control.

This structural lacuna converts most NGOs into extension agents of the government who have to work in a project and time-bound mode. Given the pressure of schedules, they are rarely in a position to tackle the structural factors responsible for marginalization. Consequently, they have become centres for the disbursement of funds received from various donors. The dependence on government for funds as also developmental intervention makes them ineffective in demanding state accountability. The silence of these civil society agents during the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002 is a case in point.

It has to be accepted, however grudgingly, that non-secular and exclusivist social collectives are equally part of civil society. Normally ignored by civil society theorists, they have of late attracted attention due to the failure of class politics, opportunism of caste and centrist politics and the failure of the masses to relate themselves with the symbols of 'secular' development (dams, modern education).

An important family of organisations in civil society has a single agenda of reorienting popular consciousness towards a right-wing cultural politics. In this age of neo-liberalism, it nurtures hundreds of organizations, many of which are registered as NGOs, working all over the country and pro-

moting its ideology. These institutions try to construct a homogenous Hindu identity cutting across caste, class and gender, primarily by invoking cultural symbols and constructing an adversarial 'other' image of minorities. Their intervention, through education and other developmental schemes, is merely a cover for disciplining the popular consciousness towards its cultural and political ideology. The members of these collectives also serve as vote banks for capturing the state apparatus through elections and further push an exclusivist agenda. Therefore, civil society becomes a domain where a reactionary particularistic identity overwhelms a universal citizens' identity.

Finally, we consider three types of advocacy groups. One, organisations which work towards protecting the civil liberties of the citizen. They came up because of the tendency of the state, in alignment with entrenched sections to indulge in violence against its citizen, especially the poor. They also document and publicise violation of civil liberties of vulnerable social groups by dominant social groups. These groups comprise of people with faith in a democratic left ideology. However, some tend to support revolutionary violence as a response to state violence even as others decry violence irrespective of its nature.

Two, new groups have emerged against the centralised, unaccountable, patriarchal and at times communal character of the state/society. They primarily draw on the legacy of new social movements. These groups focus on people-centric development, tribal self-rule, attempt to make the state and its institutions transparent and accountable, protest against 'development' induced displacement, patriarchal domination, caste oppression, and the communalisation of polity and

society. The ideological proclivity of these groups varies, but all of them can be broadly classified as progressive and democratic in nature and most of them oppose the present form of globalisation.

Though these two types of advocacy groups are successful in articulating genuine demands of the people, they remain at the periphery. In most instances they operate within parameters set by the state, even if some of them do not believe in the institutions of the state. This makes them more reactive than pro-active. Another reason for their limited success is a lack of coverage by the popular print and electronic media that increasingly caters to only the tastes of the middle and upper middle classes.

The last in our series are caste-based advocacy groups. Initially, the upper castes formed social collectives in order to 'protect' their culture and maintain their social hegemony. The overlapping membership between such collectives and the state institutions helped them in their endeavour. Subsequently, social collectives of lower castes came up to claim their legitimate space in the public domain. Presently, the primary aim of all caste collectives is to protect, often through violent means, the social, political and economic interests of their members. Though part of civil society, their objective is to influence/manipulate the state apparatus for sectarian ends, an endeavour greatly helped by the 'politicisation of castes'.

Overall, we see that a wide variety of social collectives have come up in post-colonial India depending upon the context-specific interaction of society, polity and economy. The collectives trying to articulate people's agenda remain on the periphery while those with an exclusivist agenda have come to the fore. Their clout perhaps

owes most to the ascendancy of middle class politics. This class comprising not more than 8-10% of the population claims legitimacy to speak on behalf of the society. It has also given legitimacy to market friendly economic policies and right-wing politics, both united in the belief that one has to be satisfied with whatever endowment one originally had.

This can be better understood by dissecting the claim that the market creates equal opportunities for all, a claim hinging on the critical assumption that initial distribution of property is equal. The market not only excludes people as consumers if they lack income, it also excludes them as producers or sellers if they fall short of assets/capabilities.⁷ In the absence of equitable asset distribution, such pro-market economic policies can result in increasing inequality between and within social groups and widen inter and intra regional disparities. Similarly, the Hindutva ideology resents all types of democratic assertion. Any assertion by dalits is regarded as spoiling the social order, by women as destroying 'peaceful' family life and by labour as retarding the production process and efficiency.

The India of this minority, no doubt, shines, but at the expense of a dark and bleak India of the majority. In such a politico-economic milieu, the threat to cherished values of social equality and democratic welfare emanates from numerous institutions present in the civil society. There are several struggles against them but they continue to be rather localised. Unless they achieve an organic unity through dissolving political differences, the threat will always remain potent.

2. Deepak Nayyar, 'Economic Development and Political Democracy: Interaction of Economics and Politics in Independent India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(49), 3121-22.

Whither women's health

GITA SEN

RECENT trends in public and policy awareness about women's health needs and concerns, and actual access by women to the means and services to address those concerns show complex and contradictory tendencies. This paper identifies these tendencies and argues that a critical absence of focused attention to their implications underlies the weak progress made in improving women's health in the country.

The decade of the 1990s highlighted a number of policy shifts and changes with direct and indirect implications for women's health. These include (i) the overarching economic reforms agenda with its emphasis on liberalizing controls in different industries, and controlling the fiscal deficit through real expenditure cuts; (ii) a contested paradigm shift in national population policy in line with the new ICPD ethos of meeting the reproductive and sexual health needs of individuals and couples; (iii) growing concern over HIV/Aids and its increasing 'feminisation' as it spreads from high-risk groups into the general population; and (iv) growing recognition after the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights and the Fourth World Conference on Women of Beijing (1995) of violence against

women as a major health and human rights problem.

These tendencies have had differing and at times quite contradictory implications for awareness about women's health and women's access to health services. To understand why this is so, it is necessary to have a panoramic view of awareness and access prior to the 1990s.

Were women's health needs taken seriously prior to the 1990s? Although women became central targets of the family planning programme from the late 1960s on, it is well known that their reproductive health needs were neither acknowledged as a policy concern nor set within an overall integrated approach to their health. The field of women's health in India was full of resounding policy and research silences, misdirected and partial approaches, and insufficient attention to critical issues such as co-morbidity¹ or the reversal of the traditional gender paradox in health.² In many ways these problems in India mirrored a global lack of attention to gender equity in health. But the acute nature of gender bias and son preference in the country made their consequences even more severe.

In a country that had the first modern public family planning programme, and in which targeted programmes for female sterilization had

grown rapidly, the lack of awareness of the range and intensity of women's reproductive health problems was all the more ironic. The prevalence of reproductive tract infections, unmet contraceptive needs, infertility, uterine prolapse and fistulae were practically unacknowledged prior to the 1990s. Women's own stated discomfort with IUDs was ignored or dismissed as psychosomatic.

Problems of irregular bleeding and amenorrhea were left unaddressed despite growing evidence of the prevalence of under- and mal-nutrition and iron-deficiency anemia among girls and women. The cross-linkages between anemia and vulnerability to malaria continued to be ignored by policy and programme. So also did the prevalence of violence against women and its connections to sexual health and rights. In a country where abortion had been legal since the early 1970s, it continued to be unsafe for an overwhelming majority of those who needed the service.

It is true that awareness of the problem of declining sex-ratios and gender bias within households in favour of boys' and men's nutrition and health care had grown. But many other problems, such as those above, were only weakly recognized. And if the field of reproductive health was weak during this period, this was even more true of areas such as occupational, environmental or mental health. Nor was much attention given to gender concerns in the handling of infectious diseases.

Undoubtedly the weak policy and funding support that bedevilled public health infrastructure and services in this period was experienced most seriously by the poor and by women especially among the poor. Official statistics on illness in the latter half of the 1980s shows very simi-

lar rates for women and men (with the caveat that women in India tend to underreport illness), but higher untreated illness rates for women. Poor household members were less likely to get their illness treated, and these differences by household economic class status (as measured by household consumption expenditure) were more acute among women than among men. That is, the access gap for poor women was greater than for poor men.

Overall, because of the continuing weaknesses of the public sector health services, and relatively low cost differentials between public and private health providers, over 70 per cent of outpatient care was provided by the private sector. However, partly because of greater cost differentials, only 40 per cent of inpatient care was handled by the private sector.³

Major changes in awareness regarding women's health among researchers, policy-makers, and funding agencies occurred during the 1990s. Although many women's health groups had been critiquing the narrow, sterilization-focused and target-driven approach of the family planning programme and had challenged the conditions under which new reproductive technologies were being introduced in the country, it wasn't until the conferences of the 1990s (Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing) that major changes in policy thinking occurred. The recognition in Vienna of women's rights as human rights and of violence against women as a violation of those rights, the paradigm shift of ICPD from top-down demographic control to population policies focused on meeting reproduc-

1. For more discussion of the consequences of not taking gender seriously, see Gita Sen, Asha George and Piroska Ostlin, 'The case for gender equity in health research', *Journal of Health Management*, 4:2 (2002) and *Engendering International Health: the Challenge of Equity* (eds) Gita Sen, Asha George and Piroska Ostlin, The MIT Press, 2002.

2. The traditional gender paradox in health is defined by the fact that in many countries, women have higher morbidity (sickness) rates than men, but men have higher mortality (death) rates. This does not appear to be true in India – women are both more ill, and die off at a higher rate than men.

3. For more detailed analysis of the National Sample Survey data, see Gita Sen, Aditi Iyer and Asha George, 'Structural reforms and health equity: a comparison of NSS surveys, 1986-87 and 1995-96', *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(14), 6-12 April 2002.

tive and sexual health and reproductive rights, and the reinforcement of these forward shifts at the Beijing conference had a major impact on policy thinking.

The direct impact was the repudiation of targets in the family planning programme, and the attempt to introduce an approach to service delivery based on community needs assessment. A new programme on Reproductive and Child Health (RCH 1) was introduced with major donor funding and with significant new programme elements included. Although neither the target-free approach nor RCH 1 were as effective as the intention behind them, the policy direction appeared definitely to be changing. However, the RCH programme depends for its effectiveness on the public health infrastructure of subcentres, PHCs and hospitals, as well as staffing, logistics and management inputs from the public health system. This system went through major negative changes during this period. Thus the change in the policy paradigm was undermined by opposite changes in the public health system.

During this entire period, the health sector was undergoing the direct and indirect effects of structural reforms in the overall economy. Real expenditures on public health stagnated, accompanied by infrastructural decline and rising user charges. Perhaps the most significant increases in health costs came from the rapid liberalization of the pharmaceutical industry resulting in sharp increases in drug costs. Spiralling costs have had a significant impact on access. According to the NSS surveys, the importance of 'financial reasons' for not treating illness has gone up sharply.⁴

Recent detailed micro studies of poverty in 12 villages of Rajasthan and 20 villages of Gujarat show health

costs as the single most important reason for households falling into poverty in the last 25 years.⁵ Barring PHC use, the use of public and private hospitals, nursing homes and health facilities run by charitable institutions are all now tilted strongly towards the better-off economic groups.⁶ This is true for both women and men. This means that not only the private sector health services, but even public health services are more utilized by the better off.

Against this composite picture of heightened inequality in health access, the attempts by donors to promote health sector reforms through SWAPs have had little if any impact. Why SWAPs have not been able to take off in the health sector is a larger question. For our purposes, the main point is that as a policy initiative, it did not function to counteract the decline in access to public health services, reduce costs, or provide a firm basis for the paradigm changes contained in RCH 1. How and whether this changes under RCH 2 remains to be seen.

While the paradigm shift towards the ICPD approach appeared to be gaining ground during the 1990s, this seems to have become more shaky recently. The implementation of the paradigm change was opposed by traditional population controllers even in the early phase. However, the opposition came largely from sections of academics and field staff, some of

whom at least have since modified their stance. But politicians in some states and more worryingly, at the Centre, have begun jumping on the population control bandwagon.

One of the fallouts of the forced sterilizations during the Sanjay Gandhi period was that no politician wanted to be associated with the family planning programme which was, as a result, left in the hands of the bureaucrats. The renewed debates set off by ICPD have made population once more a 'touchable' issue for the political class. Unfortunately, they are significantly under-informed about the proximate causes of continuing population growth in the country. They are unaware that high fertility desires are projected to make a very small contribution to the anticipated growth of Indian population in this century. The momentum of past population growth (due to a young age-structure) and unwanted fertility will account for over three-quarters of the increase.

Thus, focusing on incentives or disincentives on family size will have very little impact on the growth of population. If we are indeed concerned to bring down the growth rate of population, we would do better by improving the quality of family planning services, empowering women to make reproductive decisions, and lowering the effect of population momentum by raising the effective age at marriage (through keeping girls in school longer, providing them with income earning opportunities).⁷

Although a number of influential stakeholders including retired senior bureaucrats and donor agencies, not to mention women's organizations, have been arguing against them,

4. Sen, Iyer and George (2002); *ibid*.

5. Ill health and expenses were stated to be important in 85 per cent of all cases of households falling into poverty in the Gujarat villages. See Anirudh Krishna et al, 'Falling into poverty in a high-growth state: escaping poverty and becoming poor in Gujarat villages', *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(49), 6-12 December 2003.

6. An apparently growing epidemic of unnecessary C-sections and hysterectomies in the private sector compounds this dismal picture.

7. Gita Sen, 'Population: a new paradigm for old and new concerns,' in *Challenge of Sustainable Development: the Indian Dynamics* (eds) Ramprasad Sengupta and Anup K. Sinha,

a number of state governments have introduced electoral and other disincentives.⁸ Currently similar sounds are being heard among key central actors as well. Other than winning imaginary brownie points in an election year, these acts will have little positive impact, and may only serve to further undermine the hard-won change in the population paradigm away from its long association with coercive methods.

Although the first HIV case in the country was detected only as late as 1986 in Chennai, a decade of silent but deadly spread of the disease now leaves us with approximately four million official cases and perhaps 10 million actual cases. After South Africa, India now has the largest number of HIV-infected persons using the official estimate. Over 85 per cent of transmission is sexual, and a growing proportion is heterosexual. Almost 90 percent of reported cases are in the age 18-49, i.e., the most sexually active and economically productive population. Women currently account for about a quarter of the infections, but given the rate at which the infection appears to be spreading from the so-called 'high risk' groups to the general population, this ratio is very likely to increase in the near future. The window of opportunity for controlling the epidemic in the country may be closing rapidly.⁹

The most alarming aspect of the current situation is the combination

of heterosexual transmission and the weakness of sexual rights for women in the country. The right to say 'no' to sex within marriage, and the ability to negotiate condom use with male partners are capacities that very few women have. Family planning practices in even a more socially advanced state such as Kerala see couples typically using no family planning methods after marriage until the desired two children have been had. At this point the woman undergoes sterilization. Spacing and condom use are still relatively rare.

Rising concerns about HIV/Aids have certainly generated greater willingness to tackle awareness about sexuality, adult and adolescent sexual behaviour, and complex issues of medical ethics. However, social awareness changes slowly, and this area has received little by way of political leadership. Furthermore, the spread of HIV/Aids is likely to further stretch the capacity of public health infrastructure to meet women's health needs.

All the dilemmas faced by women's health at this time point in the direction of approaches that reinforce women's rights. The responsibility to ensure these rights lies with families, communities and the government at both state and central level. Ensuring effective and equitable access to affordable health services is the job of the state. An effective public health infrastructure can act as a floor for health access, and is a crucial ingredient of poverty reduction. Providing this on a priority basis will both improve health status and also support the paradigm changes of the 1990s.

But women's health as we know is not only a matter of access to services; it also requires a change in mindsets and power equations. Without these changes, no real paradigm change is possible.

IIM Calcutta (2003); Leela Visaria and Pravin Visaria, An analysis of the long term projections for major states of India, 1991-2101 (revised draft).

8. Gita Sen and Aditi Iyer, 'Incentives and disincentives: necessary, effective, just?' *Seminar* 511, March 2002.

9. See Surcsh Mohammed, 'The Ugandan response to HIV/Aids: some lessons for India', *The National Medical Journal of India* 16(5), 2003.

Abdicating responsibility

RAMA BARU

THE abdication of public responsibility in health is evident when one examines the gap in mortality indicators across social groups, the resurgence and outbreak of epidemics and the poor and unequal access to basic needs for large sections of the population. The gap in mortality indicators between different social groups, viz. scheduled tribe, scheduled caste and others, reflects the extent of deprivation that exists among the vulnerable sections and the relative prosperity of the middle and upper middle classes.

An analysis of the National Family Health Survey data for infant mortality rate and under five mortality rates across ST, SC and the general population reveals that for both the scheduled categories the infant mortality rate and child mortality rate is

significantly higher in both rural and urban areas when compared to 'others' in the population. The reasons for these variations can only be explained in terms of the deprivation of access to basic needs in terms of livelihoods, nutritional security, safe water, and shelter and health services to these sections.

Another important indicator of deprivation of vulnerable sections is the repeated outbreak of communicable diseases, referred to as the 'diseases of the poor' like malaria, gastroenteritis, kala azar, Japanese encephalitis and so on. While some of these have been reported in the press, many smaller epidemics have largely gone unnoticed. An analysis of the outbreak of epidemics shows both a regional and social variation. These outbreaks have been largely confined to the poorer states

like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Within these and other states it is the tribal and dalit population who disproportionately bear the burden of mortality.

Investigation into the causes for these outbreaks reveals the interaction of several social and economic factors. During the mid-90s there was an outbreak of gastroenteritis in the Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh. The cause for the outbreak was investigated by civil liberties groups, which provided some valuable insights. The report revealed that the tribal population in this district had no access to livelihood for several months before the outbreak, as a result of which they were unable to even fulfil the basic caloric requirements. The public distribution system was practically non-existent and due to severe drought the forests could not be tapped for food sources. This was further compounded by lack of safe water supply.

When the outbreak occurred the people resorted to private practitioners since the public health services were neither available nor responsive. It is only when the suffering and death caused by the epidemic was reported in the vernacular newspapers that the government sent a team to investigate the outbreak. This is a clear case of abdication of public responsibility of not only the health services, which should have responded to the disease and death as a result of the outbreak, but more importantly to chronic deprivation due to lack of access to

basic needs like safe water supply, food security and livelihoods.

Health services are just one input for improving the health status of the population. Therefore, their availability and accessibility is a domain of public responsibility and cannot be treated like any other commodity and left to market forces. The major reasons are the vulnerability of people who suffer from illnesses when they approach a health service provider, the asymmetry of information between the provider and receiver of care, and incomplete information regarding the service being provided since it is mediated and influenced by the doctor. These reasons become compelling arguments for advocating the importance of the state in financing and provisioning of health services.

sector has assumed in provisioning and utilization of services.

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The coexistence of the public and private sectors for provisioning gets reflected in the patterns of utilization of health services in India. Several analyses of the National Sample Survey data, National Family Health Survey and the NCAER household survey show a fairly consistent pattern of utilization. These surveys show that there is a high reliance on private providers for the treatment of minor ailments but for conditions requiring hospitalization there is variation in utilization across income groups. The middle and upper middle classes have moved out of public provisioning and rely more on the private sector for hospitalization compared to the poor who depend on the public sector.

The 52nd Round of the NSS shows that for the treatment of minor illness, the poor use public health facilities three times less as compared to the richest quintile. In case of hospitalization, the share of the richest 20% for in-patient days is nearly six times more than the poorest. This shows that in states where the private sector is not very significant, the rich and middle classes still resort to public hospitals. In the poorer states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan the richest 20% had utilized more than 50% of total inpatient days.

This essentially implies that the poorer sections who constitute a large proportion of the population are going without care for reasons such as high opportunity cost and lack of resources, availability and accessibility. The rising cost of care for treatment in public and private hospitals explains why the poor are not utilizing services. In fact studies have shown that the poor spend a disproportionately higher percentage of their income on health services than the rich and as a result delay

Differentials in IMR and Under Five Mortality According to Rural/Urban and Social Groups

Social Groups	Rural		Urban	
	(IMR)	(Under 5 years)	(IMR)	(Under 5 Years)
Scheduled Tribe	86.9	131.4	57.6	79.6
Scheduled Caste	88.1	127.3	60.4	84.0
Others	69.3	93.1	43.5	57.0

Source: NFHS II.

seeking treatment. When they do go for treatment they often have to borrow or sell what little assets they have to pay for health services.

There are several barriers that the poor and sections of the middle class face while accessing the public sector. These include lack of transportation, inadequate financial resources and insensitive treatment in public hospitals. Given the inadequacy of financial resources the poor rarely resort to private hospitals because the costs are prohibitive; even for the middle class an episode of serious illness can wipe out family assets.

Large sections of the population in this country are, therefore, faced with a difficult choice between the public and private sector. A public service, for which they have to incur opportunity costs, though less expensive, is often not easily accessible, unresponsive and lacks accountability even as the private sector is expensive, exploitative as also lacks accountability. It is in this context that one needs to redefine and reassess the importance of public responsibility in health services.

During the last three decades there has been a great deal of criticism of public health services with several studies highlighting their inadequacies. The criticism of public services in the social sectors has come from both the 'left' and 'right' for very different set of motives and reasons. Representing the interests of the working classes and poorer sections, the 'left' highlighted the inability of the state to address the needs of these sections while the 'right' which viewed welfare services as wasteful, focused on its limitations to legitimise privatization. Those who were concerned with the ill-effects of privatization put their energies into investigating the private sector and its inadequacies. However, these studies while highlighting 'mar-

ket failures' in health services rarely addressed the reasons for the inadequacies of the public sector.

Most studies on the problems of public health services begin with the proposition that they are inefficient and unresponsive but without adequately studying the underlying causes. These studies look at the public and private sectors as independent of one another and therefore do not analyse how increasing commercialisation and accommodation of private interests within public systems affects public services in the long run. Even the comparison of quality between the public and private sectors has been fraught with conceptual and methodological limitations.

The studies on public hospitals cite inadequate funding, lack of infrastructural facilities, inadequate supply of drugs and equipment as important reasons for poor functioning. These are no doubt important factors with policy consequences but there are other processes that inhibit public services. While inadequate funding and infrastructural issues offer explanations at the level of structure, they do not adequately uncover the processes at the 'deeper' level in institutions and society at large in terms of changing values and norms of personnel and users of services.

The changing values and norms within public services are not isolated from what is happening in society at large. It is here that increasing commercialisation and consumerism have a deep impact on values, norms, aspirations and lifestyles, especially of the middle classes. The providers and users of medical care are largely drawn from this strata and over time they start comparing the public and private sectors in terms of salaries, patient loads and the quality of physical infrastructure. This comparison has resulted in

the devaluation of public institutions that are to start with already under-funded and overcrowded with poor infrastructural inputs.

Therefore, the commercialisation of health services is not merely an increase in the number of private hospitals and clinics but at a deeper level it devalues all that the public sector stands for. Worse, it increasingly equates the ability to pay with better quality. Little surprise that the under-funded public sector was devalued by a large section of the providers and consumers. The yardstick of comparison becomes the larger private hospitals that seem to offer better care, higher salaries for doctors, better working conditions and, as a consequence, higher status.

One thus needs to locate the analysis of the abdication of public responsibility in health services at three levels – first, in terms of the changes in the structures of provisioning in the public and private sectors; second, the extent and nature of inter-relatedness between the two, and third, the changes in values, norms and aspirations in society with increasing consumerism and commercialisation during the last three decades. The process of commercialisation and consumerism has challenged collective responsibility and, therefore, undermined public institutions as well.

An analysis of health status indicators and utilization of health services acts as a window through which one can see the many realities in which we live. More than the gaps across classes, there is increasingly a certain callousness and lack of concern among the middle classes for those who live at the edge. Among the middle classes the notion of a collective responsibility in the social sectors is being replaced by individual responsibility and greater dependence on

the private and non-government sectors, which may explain why there is so little pressure on the state to invest more in these areas.

In Britain the National Health Service enjoys support from the middle and working classes unlike the Indian urban middle class that has 'exited' from publicly provided services over the recent past. When Margaret Thatcher tried to privatize the National Health Service in Britain there was strong opposition from the middle and working classes; the 'voice' of protest and resistance came from both the providers and consumers and acted as an alternative to 'exit'.

In the Indian context, the 'voice' within and outside the public services has remained weak. The middle class 'exit' from public services without giving adequate 'voice' in order to improve its quality has contributed to their rapid deterioration. An important question that needs to be posed is whether this deterioration should be used as a justification for dismantling the state or do we look for reasons why the state remains important and how it can be made more accountable to its citizens.

A recent research project on 'Rights, Representations, and the Poor' conducted in Delhi showed that citizens continue to have high expectations of the state to meet their basic needs. The survey was conducted across different residential settlements covering planned colonies, unauthorized regularized, unauthorized unregularised, and *jhuggi jhompris* and slums. A high percentage of those surveyed were of the opinion that the government was responsible for meeting their basic needs and saw its role in solving their problems. Many had approached the government directly, followed by political parties and the judiciary, while a small proportion had

approached 'big men' for help. This study provides a contrast to the conventional middle class perception of the state which is marked by cynicism. For the poor, the state continues to be an important player despite the problems of poor governance, ineffectiveness and its withdrawal from key welfare areas. Therefore, even when the government is in the process of handing over welfare services to civil society organizations, the poor continue to have high expectations of the government.

This study shows that the perception regarding the role of the state in providing basic needs varies across classes. The middle and upper classes see the government's role as redundant and advocate privatization, while the poor perceive the state to be 'central to individual and collective life.' This both reiterates the importance of state involvement and challenges some of the assumptions underlying privatization. The fact that the poor want the government to provide basic needs cannot ignore the poor quality of services that they receive. Instead, this perception of the state as central to collective life should be used to pressurize decision-makers to invest more in welfare services.

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Taking the shine off India

SUHEL SETH

THE last time political advertising was successful was when it propelled Margaret Thatcher to power in England. But even that campaign did not engender the kind of illusions that India's present right-wing regime has inflicted on a hapless nation and that too with taxpayer's money.

I have always decried political advertising with invariably more promise than delivery, and this is precisely what is wrong with India Shining. It talks about another India and that too when the neglected India is equally visible. The problem is not the insularity of the medium, but instead of the idea. How can anyone expect the Mumbaikar to believe in a Shining India when every morning he or she can see thousands defecate on the roads because we haven't been able to provide toilets and basic housing? How can one explain away street urchins and begging children when one actually sees them at traffic intersections.

India Shining, besides being illusory, is also urban in idea and practice. The fact that feel-good has no honest translation in Hindi is adequate proof of the exclusivity of the thought behind the campaign. Political campaigns must embrace, not isolate, and they must be built on the bedrock of a single competitive idea, which the advertising hacks dub USP. It is this competitive edge that is missing from a campaign which is more about mush and less about substance. It is here that the enduring values of the campaign are woefully lacking.

The fact that the government in power chose to unleash this advertising blitz keeping in mind that elections were round the corner reflects an ethics which is bound to have a lasting impact on electoral politics in this country. I believe we have used advertising in a manner that demeans not only the intelligence of an average Indian, it also makes a mockery of

elections and how they should either be managed or for that matter won.

Let's begin with analysing the campaign and the backdrop against which it was set. Quite clearly, the fact that this campaign was part of the Finance Ministry's budget tells us that it had something to do with the fiscal progress (or decline) that we as a country have experienced. But the reality is that this campaign has instead become the leitmotif of the BJP's election *mantra* and is now even plastered on Advani's *rath*: yet another example of plagiarism at its worst. The objective surely must have been to raise the investment profile for Brand India globally, to tell the world that we are and have become, thanks to the BJP, a robust and important economic power and that every Indian today is well off, that every farmer uses mobile telephones to inform his wife of his lunch menu and every villager is now experiencing broadband and plushly carpeted motorways. Because this is what the campaign does and this is where it fails.

The campaign is so generic in nature that it could work as well for a motorcycle company such as Bajaj as it does, say, for Brand India. The imagery used in the campaign is equally contrived: which is at times, certainly the role of advertising, but only when you are selling beauty soaps such as Lux piggy-back riding on film actresses, not when you are attempting a prolific and enduring branding exercise for a country! The visuals are unreal to the Indian: they may be of immense novelty value to the foreigner, but then the question that begs an answer is who constitutes the target segment. If the target segment is a person abroad, then the whole story is wrong because quite frankly he is not interested in a historical journey that we in India have travelled to finally attain economic *nirvana*.

The advertising would then need to be different and placed in different media, which it is not. Hence my suspicion that the campaign is meant for every Indian, or so the makers of this advertising believe. This again is a problem, because which Indian do you wish to address? For the Indian who is currently feeling good, you don't need to remind him of the experience and certainly not by spending so much money. And if it's the other Indian, then let water flow from his taps first before you can get him to buy into your advertising. There is a sharp disconnect in terms of what you say on television and the reality that this particular Indian experiences.

Take a look then at the timing of this campaign. Very clearly designed to hit the market as it were after one round of state elections and before a general election: state elections in which the ruling party makes visible gains – three states out of four. A party that is now gearing up for general elections with the same tired brand, Atal Behari Vajpayee, but one that has clearly understood the might of the media and how it can be pandered to. So it does what all brands in trouble do: blitzkrieg the media and hopefully be Orwellian in approach by making half-truths come across as sharp reality and this is exactly what India Shining has done.

The ambiguity of the phrase allows the slogan to be used across anything: so if you win a cricket match it is India Shining; if Amitabh Bachchan is honoured in Morocco it is India Shining; if Air Canada announces an additional flight it is India Shining; if Air India takes off and lands on time, then it is India Shining. In effect, the entire advertising proposition, because of ambiguity and expanse, has also lent itself to both trivialisation as well as general ridicule, which ideally

should have been avoided. There is no ownership that the BJP has been able to establish except that of an advertising line. The truth of the matter, however, is that they should have sought to own an overpowering idea: instead they fell for some copywriter's charm and stuck to sloganeering. It is precisely this easy way out that has left the campaign dry and insipid.

Let's now come down to the thinking routes employed in this campaign. It is clear from the tone and manner of the campaign that it was set in English, with no rural or vernacular nuances. An English speaking copywriter thought of what is clearly an urban campaign: not one which attacks or soothes the masses who occupy the heartland of India and who, incidentally, are the people who will go out and vote on a hot morning!

The campaign clearly is off-target even in terms of its idiom. And this is extremely dangerous for any political campaign. Political campaigns are built on the belief of the lowest common denominator principle, never on the basis of the highest common factor. India Shining is about the classes and not about the masses; hence the appreciation of the masses is inadequate in what the campaign attempts to do. India Shining could easily have been a bottom-up emergent thought. Instead, convenience determined that it become a top-down campaign, thus failing to belong.

It failed for two reasons: the classes viewed it as just another mushy advertisement, one among the seventeen they see in a two minute break between episodes of a soap opera, whereas the rural folk perceived it as a message of conviction and belief, not trite advertising. This is where even the conception of a basic advertising premise was flawed and continued to remain so throughout the

several-part campaign. The thinking behind the campaign did not (and still hasn't) factored in some harsh political realities that can easily be presented to counter the India Shining proposition both on the fiscal as also on the non-fiscal front.

The blemishes in the campaign with a line as strong as India Shining are several. One can easily talk about the fact that never before under any regime did we in India witness more financial scams than we have under the BJP. Never has more market cap been wiped out because of corruption in our bourses than under the BJP. In fact, the Calcutta Stock Exchange is virtually defunct. Never has India been more suspect in the eyes of foreign institutional investors with what happened to UTI and more recently the IDFC. The fact that this government oversaw a pogrom in Gujarat tells us another shameful story: one amongst many that we in India have experienced.

Where was India Shining when we lost so many brave men in Kargil, ostensibly an intelligence failure? Where was India Shining when the Agra Summit was a dead horse? Or when India experienced humiliation at the hands of the United States, which post 9/11 warmed up to Pakistan like never before. In almost every sphere India has many a time been found wanting. And though this is true of most countries, but then most countries have political parties which do not think it proper to boast of achievements that pale in comparison with their accumulated failures. I am not for a moment suggesting that all country-branding advertising needs to be complimentary or for that matter honest either. The problem arises when advertising is expected to replace the real pain and the real issues that people face from time to time. It is that which

we need to understand and display whilst buying such advertising or for that matter releasing it.

I must also spend some time talking about the role of the media. Let's face it, there is a lot of lucre that this campaign has thrown up. Full and half page advertisements in colour mean a lot of revenue for any publication and since the campaign stretches across all media, the avarice and greed factor is substantial to say the least, which is precisely my worry. How can we expect fair play from large parts of the media, which in any case have been submerged with government dole? What stand will these publications or channels take given the fact of a slow buyout of the media by a ruling party? And that too on the eve of elections. And with a campaign, which by the nature of its core thought, 'India Shining', effectively tells the world *sab theek hai* with India!

This hyperbole, matched by the intensity of an unending spending spree, is worrying. And if one examines the role of the media, then I am not very wrong. Post the launch of the campaign, the media has lapped up India Shining like never before. Save for fiercely independent channels such as NDTV and papers like *The Statesman* or magazines such as *Outlook* in the urban mediascape, almost every other paper or channel or magazine has been effusive in its praise for the campaign. So am I the only cynic left along with some die-hard communists who believe a great disservice has been done to the consumer or the voter per se? Clearly, what this campaign and the overall process has also achieved is a subtle purchasing of the media.

The sell-out of the media has never been more comprehensive, in any case under this government, and thus the campaign itself is merely the icing on the cake! More than any other

government in independent India, it is the NDA which has given more television programmes to editors, taken more journalists to international junkets and elevated some of this tribe to the Rajya Sabha, besides putting them, their wives and at times even their mothers-in-law on government committees. If such is the trend that the government has assiduously followed, then India Shining is only a natural corollary, not something that is accidental or strategic in nature.

Another aspect of such campaigns is the unfairness of strength, which should be a cause for concern for those who run the election machinery in this country. I completely disagree with the Election Commission's logic that no advertising of this nature is permitted after the notification. Advertising campaigns have a gestation period in terms of delivering an impact and here we must remember that the advertising went through a learning curve which no notification would have either stunted or stymied.

The Commission should have observed the unethicality of the process and not merely the timing. To my mind the Commission has inadvertently damaged future election frays by telling the world, albeit tacitly, that if you are in government go ahead and spend the taxpayer's money if you want to return to power—a self-defeating thought in itself. The fact that the Commission has condoned as it were this huge expense, signals an inequality which any democratic system will now be saddled with.

Take the India Shining case as a prime example: a government in power spends your money and mine and leaves a hapless opposition to scurry for money that will eventually have to be its own. The ruling party thus benefits from a double whammy: it is able to whip up a campaign that it does

not have to pay for and collects money that it does not have to spend on advertising, whereas for the opposition it is a no-win situation right through. I have earlier argued for streamlining the funding process for elections and making it more transparent, but I guess that is a thought much like Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot!

One must also confess that the India Shining campaign and the movement it has spawned is rather Roman in its nature and belief – a shoddy attempt to make things look good when they are not. It is an attempt to deceive rather than inform and what's worse, an attempt to colour people's judgement about good governance by showing them an India that is more at home in coffee table books rather than in reality. For a manufacturer of candy to do this may be fine, but for the state to impose such conditioning is not only tragic, it smacks of an arrogance that can only come out of too much power going to one's head too quickly.

Finally, stable and sound practitioners of advertising, especially political advertising, will tell you that campaigns with embedded hyperbole are resorted to only when the politician and the party are desperate. If India was truly shining, then would we need to be told? Would we need to see more government advertising than for all the FMCG goods put together?

I see the India Shining campaign as a desperate attempt by some desperate people who are more fearful than confident of going back to the hustings. These are early warning signals of a setting sun, not of a rising one. The campaign with its shrillness attempts to conceal more than it reveals and therein lies its faultline. For once the communication will be vastly tangential to the reality and more and more people will perhaps remember the advertising and fervently hope they forget the product!

It's time to disco

JAMAL MECKLAI

JUST as the horizon shimmers when the sun is coming up, India is shimmering at a new dawn in its history. And, just as it takes several hours for the sun to rise to its peak in the heavens, it will take some time – a couple of decades perhaps – before India rises to the crest of this particular cycle in world history. To put a rather arcane time line on this, let us recall that when the British came to India, we were among the more vibrant economies in the world, at least from the point of view of world trade. In the three odd centuries since then, we were driven into the ground – again, using world trade as a single measure variable. Thus, the down cycle took around 350 years.

Currently, we appear to be up from the deepest depths – our share of world trade has grown from 0.5% about 10 years ago to 0.8% today. Now to estimate how much longer it will take us to reach our peak (of this cycle), we need to recognize that technology has compressed time. However, estimating this compression is impossible, so we will make an *ad hoc* judgment that change that takes a decade today would correspond to what took a century earlier. By this calculation, I estimate that India will be truly shining – at its peak in the heavens – in some 20 to 25 years. I can't wait. Let's dance!

Of course, none of this – or very, very little of this – has to do with the BJP or the Congress or any of our other political parties. All of them are by now morally bankrupt and hustling hysterically to claim credit for this upswing, which is really part of a much larger, natural cycle. To be fair, the current ruling party (and the ruling party before this) can, and should, get some credit for some positive steps

they have taken. But if these steps are set off against other steps – of both commission and omission – that they have also taken, the balance is decidedly negative.

Thus, political sound-bytes aside, let us begin by acknowledging that India is shining – no, shimmering – *despite*, not because of, our politicians.

I know this sort of talk is anathema in Delhi, where most ‘thinking people’ eat, drink and dream politics. Being so close to the political centre perhaps makes them oblivious to the fact that in the rest of the country – as, indeed, all over the world – politics is getting less and less relevant. The steady economic growth of the past decade and, critically, the advent of the information age have made political patronage far less important in delivering personal value.

Sure, there are still *chamchas* – like ‘Nalli Paket’ in the film *Mera MLA* – in every part of the country who sell themselves to political machines, but their numbers are getting smaller and their effective share of GDP is falling steeply. (Of course, with elections under way, the *chamchas* are noisier than usual, so their decline in absolute numbers and in impact may not be that obvious, particularly in Delhi.) I recognize, of course, that there is no political structure – anywhere – without *chamchas*, but the good news is that there appear to be increasing numbers of young(er) people entering politics, and while youth is not totally exempted from foolishness and venality, I do believe that, in general, younger people are more into life, which gives them less time for *chamchagiri*.

But enough about politics and politicians. As I have already said,

India is shimmering despite its politicians. India is shimmering as a result of the new era that is dawning on the globe.

The last era – the era of deterministic capitalism, so well embodied by America since the 1950s – is over, and has been for some time. Modernism, which was, if you will, the aesthetic descriptor of this era was replaced by ‘post-modernism’ some thirty years back and, perhaps, this point should be seen as the beginning of the end of the era of determinism. The fact that the new aesthetic was given such a non-name suggests that there was at the time, little clarity or understanding of what was to come. It was clear that the way people looked at the world, at life, at themselves had changed substantively, but there was a yawning gap as to what the New New World, to coin a term, would be. There was only a sense that if modernism were about certainty, then post-modernism would be about ambiguity.

The historic centre of influence was, of course, the rich world, comprising the US, Europe and Japan. However, caught as it was in its own deterministic mindset, it was difficult for people there to comprehend, let alone express, the more nebulous aesthetic that had already started defining contemporary life. (By today, it is widely acknowledged that the number one psychological issue facing ‘contemporary’ citizens in what I would like to call the Old Old World, is a sense of a lack of control over their lives. One of many examples – the other day, I was watching a TV programme that ascribed the amazing popularity of Apple’s ipod to the fact that ‘it provides users a sanctum of certainty, which in today’s complex world, where people feel a lack of control over their lives, is invaluable.’) Only Japan, with its deep-rooted traditions,

is close to bridging the gap between the two eras, and it is hardly surprising that Japanese art, design and lifestyle has consistently been at the cutting edge of the Old Old World countries over the past few decades.

But the definition of cutting edge, of contemporary, of international is always changing. And it is only now, some three or four decades on, that we are beginning to see a fuller expression of a new world aesthetic, which has a greater component of tradition, colour and – hold your breath – God.

And it is countries like India, where tradition still drives – in the Old Old World, we would have said, limits – economic life, where pink is the new navy blue, and where God dances delightedly in most hearts, that are already becoming the New New centres of influence.

Of course, this influence has been around for some time. It started several decades ago, more or less as modernism was giving way to post-modernism. The Beatles were among the earliest Marco Polos of this change, starting in the early 1970s when George Harrison made Maharsi Mahesh Yogi a pop icon. By now, yoga is *de riguer* for anyone in the US who claims to be contemporary; there are more yoga centres than shooting ranges in California, which even now is seen as the cutting edge of the Old Old World, both culturally and technologically. Tandoori chicken long ago replaced fish and chips as the mid-market staple in the UK. And even in Europe, Indi-pop and Bollywood films are stirring the cultural pot with an intensity that was last seen in the 1970s (that decade again), when Jerry Lewis became something of a national icon in France, the corresponding cultural centre of the Really Old Old World.

[To give it some immediate and personal perspective, I recently met a

young Frenchman, Pascal Lamy, who was in India to record Hindi (and Tamil) film songs in the vernacular. He didn’t speak Hindi (or Tamil or Bengali) but had fallen in love with the music and taught himself the lyrics. Pascal of Bollywood – the name I gave him – is wonderful and has since recorded a CD with Pyarelal’s (of Laxmikant Pyarelal fame) orchestra and has toured India (16 cities) and Europe to rave reviews.]

Again, the flow of academics, designers, curators, filmmakers curious about every which aspect of Indian culture and life is reaching epidemic proportions. Over the past three months I have attended financial market seminars addressed by several IMF big-wigs, the ex finance minister of Chile and more blue chip US academics than I could count. Cutting edge media designers, curators of photography and art from leading institutions in the Old Old World, arts and business seminars and, of course, several Hollywood directors travelling (of course) incognito. This is, in addition to the expanding tribe of businessmen seeking to understand how they can get a piece of the New New action. Hotel rates are rising – and will continue to do so – and our wholly inadequate tourism and cultural infrastructure is bursting at the seams. (Hint – excellent investment opportunity.)

The sudden surge in cultural interest confirms that the Old Old World – the keepers of the keys of post-modernism – recognizes, if unconsciously, that substantive change is already happening. For, of course, cultural influence is a necessary condition for sustained economic influence. I would say that one key reason the US was able to dominate the world – ‘culturally imperialize’, in the words of the Old Old Left – so completely since the 1950s was Hollywood. America

not only sold the world its products but it also sold the world its dreams.

Well, guess who's got a film industry that is, finally, bubbling with international enthusiasm, attracting both capital and talent from all over the world? It's time to disco!

Over the next ten or twelve years, the Filmfare awards (or some upstart version) will eclipse the Oscars as an honour and, of course, a ticket to the economic top.

But – and here's the real trick – the economic top will also be different. There will be more Azim Premjis than Ken Lays or Jack Welches. The days of \$ 20 million movie stars are fast coming to an end. Consumers in the New New World are, and will be for at least the rest of this new era, considerably more sensitive to 'value for money'.

I believe one of the loudest signals about this changeover of cultural approach was heard – although not much remarked on – in the mid-1990s, when a whole herd of global MNCs, hearing about India's 250 million strong middle class, came charging into the market. Of course, in a few quick years they turned tail and ran. Statisticians were berated and the India growth story suffered a public relations reversal.

The truth, of course, was that the Indian consumer is no fool, unlike the American and other Old Old World consumer. (Why can I buy a pair of Nike shoes in the branded Nike shop on Colaba Causeway at \$20, when an identical pair costs \$60 in New York?) S/he instinctively understands value for money and will only buy at the right price. And, this again is a key point, the definition of value for money does not change materially as you move up the income curve, as anyone who has tried to do, and done, business with high-end Indian companies, and particularly Marwari com-

panies, knows. Already, global investment banks and consulting companies have a special India price and a rest-of-the-world price for the services they offer. (And, you know what, the rest-of-the-world price is moving more rapidly towards the India price than the other way around.)

The huge hue and cry in the US about BPO is further evidence of this shift. While some of the noise is political, given that this is a US presidential election year, the truth is that BPO is merely a natural process element in the shift to the New New World order. It is not fully recognized that while BPO is about labour arbitrage on the surface, the real underlying driving force is a shift to higher efficiency.

India is already a much more efficient economy than the US. Not when measured in Old Old World economic parameters like productivity of labour and capital, but when measured in New New World economic terms like life satisfaction. Interestingly, there is already a new term – Gross National Happiness – coined, apparently with this recognition.

I recently read an article about a young woman in Bangalore who works for an IT company – let's call her Seema. She's about 26, rents her own apartment, rides her own vehicle to work, goes out to nightclubs a couple of times a week, enjoys spending money on clothes and sends some cash home to her parents every month. Her salary is about \$450 a month. Now, just change Bangalore to Atlanta or Cleveland or Portland or any other American city. This young woman's Old Old World sister – let's call her Liz – lives almost exactly the same life, except that it costs her closer to \$3000 a month to sustain it. (I am using the US simply as an example here; the job situation in Europe is substantially

worse, although, to be fair, the Gross National Happiness is probably somewhat higher than in the US.)

What is worse (for the Old Old World) is that it is torn between its earlier principles and beliefs on the one hand and stark reality on the other. The conflict in the Old Old World was very clearly reflected in a cover story in an American newsmagazine some months ago, titled 'The Wal-Martization of America'. The article spoke about how the average American was being driven down the economic curve by the aggressive business practices of many US companies, notably WalMart. With technology improving internal efficiencies and enabling the sourcing of products and services from substantially cheaper – no, let's use the new term, more efficient – economies, the wages being paid to Americans were also falling. WalMart was being taken to task for being the best at the two underlying themes of the American dream – capitalism and technology.

Poor Liz can only see an improvement in her lifestyle if her costs go down – and go down dramatically. And as we all know, it's very easy to move up to first class, but awfully difficult to move down. This is why if you talk to Liz (or any of her brothers or sisters in the Old Old World) about the future, I suspect you will hear a real sense of pessimism or, at best, uncertainty.

Talk to Seema, or any other young Indian today, and you will get a huge dose of optimism. The youth of India – and, I suspect, China and other countries that innately know that modernness is really a blend of religion (or tradition) and technology – know that the future is theirs.

They are the citizens of the New New World.

And if there's one thing they know – it's time to disco!

Books

TOWARDS A FOOD SECURE INDIA: Issues and Policies edited by A. Mahendra Dev, K.P. Kannan and Nira Ramchandran. Institute for Human Development, New Delhi and Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad, 2002.

FIVE decades after the inception of the Indian Republic, there is hardly any issue on which public policy and opinion has been riven by as many contradictions and been as perplexing as the issue of food security. Witness the confusion in the sphere of public policy. Should foodgrain production be encouraged or discouraged? Should support prices and public procurement be used to enhance food production, price stability and affordability? What is the role of food subsidy and how should it be targeted towards the needy? If one witnesses the gyrations of policy over the last decade and a half on these issues, it becomes quite clear that it is being driven by short term imperatives rather than by any long term objective or vision.

Food security relates to the availability and accessibility of adequate food of acceptable quality to all at the societal level, but even more below that level to all groups, households and individuals. True, the overall situation of food availability has registered improvement since 1951, as also with regard to the nutrition status of the population. But there is little room for complacency. While, on the one hand, the BJP's India Shining campaign has focused on India's

achievements on the food front, Jean Dreze, in this volume, has called the existence of large food subsidies and the huge food stocks coexisting with large scale hunger and starvation deaths the biggest scam at this time in India!

Despite a 'comfortable' production situation and huge buffer stocks, there have been reports of sale of children for Rs 10 in Orissa and malnutrition and hunger related deaths from many parts of the country (Orissa, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, MP, Chhattisgarh). Bela Bhatia and Jean Dreze, in a report, have portrayed a picture of chronic hunger and malnutrition in Kusumatand village in Palamau district of Jharkhand, and a complete failure of the government machinery to deliver food, basic health and education through its schemes. The intrepid journalist, P. Sainath, has reported on the functioning of several hundred gruel centres in Mahboobnagar and Anantpur in Andhra Pradesh in 2003 in which people come for a gruel of broken rice and salt or jaggery. The Right to Food Campaign has recorded testimonies of people on starvation deaths and hunger through public hearings in Delhi, Orissa, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and elsewhere.

By 2001, the Government of India had accumulated huge unwanted buffer stocks of nearly 70 million tonnes. This entailed a huge fiscal cost. As Jayati Ghosh has shown (*Frontline*, 11-24 October 2003), holding the food stocks costs about Rs 2 per kg and the total

carrying cost was estimated at Rs 14,000 crore in 2002-03. However, by the beginning of September 2003, total food stocks had dipped to 22 million tonnes. Rice stocks fell to around 5 million tonnes, lower than even the buffer stock norm of 8 million tonnes for rice. In the 16 months from April 2002 to the end of July 2003, the total quantum of offtake of foodgrain has been the largest ever since food procurement and distribution was first put in place, at a total of 67 million tonnes. Where did this offtake go? Around 26 million tonnes (14 million tonnes of rice and 12 million tonnes of wheat) can be accounted for by offtake from the public distribution system (PDS). But a significant portion of these stocks was actually exported, at hugely subsidised rates, or sold in the open market. The export price was as low as the price paid by Below Poverty Line (BPL) households. So while millions remained hungry, the central government sold around 17 million tonnes of food at abysmally low rates out of the country and another six million tonnes to private traders, also at relatively low prices, while about three million tonnes of grain simply rotted. These stocks, or even the revenues earned from exports or sales, could have been used to augment rural livelihoods and purchasing power but was not.

Issues such as these, along with many other facets of the food security situation in India, merits close analysis and this is what the book under review attempts to do through 21 articles covering all dimensions (macro, regional, micro and policy) of the problem.

The total foodgrain production has increased from 50m tonnes in 1951 to 209m tonnes in 1999-00. Both the level of procurement of foodgrains and the distribution of grains under the PDS have been rising. Serious famines are a thing of the past. Problems relating to acute hunger and severe malnutrition are less acute than in the past. But even so, a large number of poor people suffer from chronic or seasonal hunger and distress migration touches endemic proportions in drought areas in the rainfed and predominantly tribal regions of Andhra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and so on. Food insufficiency is manifested in low intake of cereals, proteins, nutrients and calories among a sizeable section of the population. Combined with poor sanitation, drinking water, public and basic health facilities, the result is persistently high levels of malnutrition, especially among women and children, and high rates of infant mortality. In 1998-00, more than half the children under five years suffered from underweight while 88% of pregnant women had anaemia.

The editors of the volume make a distinction between 'growth led' and 'support led' policies for food security. The latter require a number of deliberate interventions to increase food security for the needy. A further distinction is between 'long term' and 'short term' measures. The large public distribution system which, to begin with, was a product of war time shortages and rationing, was adapted to meet the requirements of food shortages in urban and later, rural India. In the 1960s, instruments of food policy were adopted which sought to balance the interests of agricultural producers, who needed to be encouraged to grow more, and consumers, to whom food (grain) had to be made available at affordable prices. This gave rise to institutions such as the Agricultural Prices Commission (later the CACP), the Food Corporation of India and led to a further growth of the Public Distribution System (PDS). Maintaining a buffer stock of 17 to 25m tonnes was part of the policy of stabilizing prices and maintaining the PDS.

It is a moot point whether the interests of poor consumers and producers were effectively served by the measures taken. Certainly the PDS did not serve the food needs of most of the rural poor and remained restricted to the subsidized marketing of kerosene and sugar. But the steady increase in the production of foodgrains kept prices in check and also meant that the poor had greater access to foodgrains, either through the market or through other channels. These measures which were designed to increase macro and household food security were further supplemented by schemes such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme, or Food for Work (in the 1990s there has been an increase in the targeted schemes).

There is a perception that the food problem has been taken care of, by and large, by the growth of foodgrain production that has been occurring over the last few decades. The question of overall adequacy has to be carefully examined using demand and supply projections. Three of the articles in the book (by Praduman Kumar and Surabhi Mittal, P.C. Bansil and C.H. Hanumantha Rao) analyse this issue with estimates up to 2020.

Projections of the demand for foodgrains are based on projections of existing direct and indirect demand. The National Sample Survey estimates show that cereal and foodgrain consumption is declining among the top seven deciles and Hanumantha Rao in his article estimates that, with improvement in infrastructure and increased market integration, such a change could also occur for the poorest 30% of the

population. In other words, the diversification to non-food expenditure occurring at very low levels of food intake and expenditure is considered to be a beneficial change by these authors. Based on these existing demand patterns, the future demand for foodgrains has been estimated. Kumar and Mittal argue that meeting this demand would require significant total factor productivity growth. Bansil's estimates of foodgrain demand are lower and he argues that overestimating foodgrain requirement could lead to wrong policy conclusions. However, in all eventualities, overall adequacy of foodgrains depend on maintaining increase in output through productivity increase.

Greater debate and analysis is needed to examine the supposed 'diversification' to non-food expenditure of very poor households. M.H. Suryanarayana's article discounts the thesis that the poor have been diversifying their consumption basket away from food items. He shows that at the all India level, the poorest 40% have only diversified to the extent required by the principle of complementarity among food items. Basing himself on the diverse experience of different states, especially Kerala, he argues that the state needs to follow policies to increase the nutritional status of the population as a whole by introducing programmes which improve physical and economic access of foodgrains and guide consumer choice.

There is now a sea change in the policy framework of agricultural production and trade reflecting the emergence of the World Trade Organisation and the paradigmatic shift towards liberalization of markets. The WTO regime's implications for food security and the income of small farmers are examined by Mahendra Dev. At a general level, India is under no obligation to reduce subsidies or to change her policies relating to minimum support price, buffer stock and the PDS. Timely measures are required to restrict imports which could negatively affect the livelihood of small agricultural producers.

There are, of course, other reasons for policy change, arising out of the paradigmatic shift mentioned earlier. This shift is attempting to redefine both the concept of food security and ways of attaining it. V.S. Vyas's article recognizes the considerable challenges that the new paradigm poses for food security. He argues that while there is a case for reducing subsidies and increasing minimum support prices (implying a smaller role of the state), there is simultaneous need to increase direct public intervention to enhance food security of vulnerable sections, enhancement of public investment, credit, marketing and technologi-

cal support to small farm agriculture. Yoginder Alagh, on the other hand, argues for a more focused set of interventions based on an improved information system to track food insecurity.

Across and within regions, the problem of food security varies very significantly. Though many of the states are food surplus, some are food deficit. There are pockets of food deficit even in the food surplus states and almost all states have vulnerable groups which are food insecure. Even with increasing integration of markets, local food availability continues to matter since food production per capita continues to be positively and significantly related to per capita calorie intake. Given a certain pattern of agricultural production, food security is linked to livelihoods and economic access to food, which in turn depend upon the effectiveness of various interventions to increase employment, incomes, food and nutrition access.

The regional variations in the food security situation are captured in six articles which focus on the North East (Amaresh Dubey and O. Kahrpuri), Bihar (Jos Mooij), Uttar Pradesh (Nisha Srivastava), Andhra Pradesh (S. Indrakant and S. Harikishan), Rajasthan (Vidya Sagar) and Kerala (K.P. Kannan).

The North-eastern situation, described by Dubey and Kahrpuri, is quite specific, since the (flawed) NSS estimates show an *increase* in poverty between 1993-94 and 1999-00, and in the author's assessment, this poverty constrains access to food. While this is undoubtedly also true for other states, the case of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar shows that the fairly pervasive food insecurity among the vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes is also a result of the failure of government interventions, particularly the PDS and the ICDS. Jos Mooij analyses the role of various stake holders in the PDS in Bihar to show how the interest of the poor and the food insecure receive a short shrift in the state.

At a trend level, Vidya Sagar, in his article shows that foodgrain production in Rajasthan has kept up with the high growth of population but not without adding considerably to environmental stress. Agriculture in Rajasthan, being basically rainfed, is subject to sharp fluctuations in output and trend increases are easily threatened by climatic reversals as in the case of the successive droughts between 1998-2001. At the individual and household levels, droughts entail large costs and high transitory food insecurity, necessitating different coping strategies. But the costs can be mitigated through public policy. In Rajasthan, drought relief works have been historically important and the PDS

and other government programmes can add to food and nutrition security. Although the fair price shop network is very important in the state, only a small percentage of rural households avail of the PDS. On the other hand, the outreach of rural works and other anti-poverty programmes has been unduly restricted in the state by pegging the percentage of BPL households at a very low level, without taking into account the high transient poverty.

The case of Andhra Pradesh is somewhat similar to that of Uttar Pradesh. AP too is a food surplus state with high levels of malnutrition and food insecurity in certain regions and groups. Unlike UP, the provision of subsidized foodgrain (rice) to the poor has been a very significant element of state policy, with a heavy cost to the state exchequer. The scheme has probably accounted for the stability in rice consumption among the poor in the state as well as lower rural poverty levels, but the authors note that its coverage of the non-poor and low quantity of grain supplied makes it less effective than what would have been the case had the state chosen to supply a larger amount of grain at somewhat higher prices.

Kerala constitutes a special case study: the state is a food deficit one with a lower average consumption of foodgrains compared to the national average. Yet it has fared much better in terms of the outcome indicators (malnutrition, infant mortality and so on). Some of the principal reasons for this, according to Kannan, is the universal outreach of the PDS and the effectiveness of the other food and nutrition support schemes. Kannan argues that converting the scheme to a targeted one threatens to reduce its effectiveness while at the same time raising fiscal costs.

Below the state level, micro studies are useful in illuminating dimensions of food insecurity and approaches towards greater food security. These are brought together in four essays in the book analyzing experiences in the drought prone areas of Karnataka (V.M. Rao and R.S. Deshpande), tribal West Bengal (Amitava Mukherjee), mountain villages in Uttarakhand (Nira Ramchandran) and tribal Orissa (K. Sarap and M. Mahamallik).

Mukherjee's article is based on an analysis of food calendars prepared in a tribal village in West Bengal over gaps of a few years. The tribal households face acute food shortages in lean periods and fall back on different coping mechanisms to survive. This includes collection of roots, leaves and wild fruits from the CPRs and water bodies. The production system in the hill villages of Uttarakhand is also able to

cope with three to four months of foodgrain requirements. In the remaining months, the PDS (which functions relatively efficiently in these villages) is able to meet part of the food requirements but hunger and food shortages are endemic and women and children bear the burden of shortages both through over work and inadequate intake. Male migration is another important coping mechanism in the region.

The analysis of Kalahandi villages shows that the public distribution system has failed to provide poor households with access to grain due to inefficiency of the delivery system and constraints on the demand side (low income of the poor). The main focus, the authors argue, has to be on revitalizing the rural development programmes which can raise employment and incomes of the poor tribal households and build rural infrastructure.

The options to a targeted PDS are discussed in two articles (by Shikha Jha and P.V. Srinivasan, and Madhura Swaminathan). Jha and Srinivasan analyse the costs of targeting and the comparative costs of public storage and distribution with those of private agents. Among their suggestions is geographical targeting with universal coverage, improving administrative efficiency to reduce costs and restricting the role of the FCI to price stabilization and maintenance of buffer stocks. Swaminathan's article on the other hand rejects the targeted distribution of foodgrains as being too costly and administratively difficult to implement and supports reverting back to a universal PDS.

Finally, Jean Dreze presents three articles on food security and the right to food. He argues that the huge food subsidies mainly helped the large agricultural producers and not the poor and, combined with political and administrative inertia, led to the coexistence of large food stocks with widespread hunger. In an essay based on field trips to Kalahandi in Orissa and Sarguja in Chhattisgarh, Dreze emphasizes the urgent need for social security arrangements of a permanent nature which could improve the entitlements of poor tribals. He also argues (like Jha and Srinivasan) that in such areas, a universal PDS was likely to be more effective. His last essay deals with the right to food and public accountability. These issues are now being dealt with by the national Right to Food campaign and the Supreme Court has given several interim directions for the implementation of programmes (such as the SGRY, the ICDS and the mid-day meal programme) which provide livelihood and food security.

As one would expect in a book with a number of contributors, the authors do not always concur in their

conclusions and the reader has to find a way through the maze of good scholarship. But there are several conclusions on which one can infer a wide degree of consensus among the authors. The food situation may have improved at the aggregate level, but the trends in the '90s and beyond are less comforting. Moreover, large sections of the population continue to be vulnerable and food insecure. Second, the political economy of food policy and social policy in the recent years shows the domination of well entrenched groups, although policies have often been made in the name of the poor. The policies of high support prices and targeted interventions have entailed huge costs for the poor and the food insecure and should give way to more universal policies based on norms of public accountability and the recognition of the right to food and the right to life.

Ravi S. Srivastava

LIBERALISATION AND LABOUR: Labour Flexibility in Indian Manufacturing by L.K. Deshpande, A.N. Sharma, A.K. Karan and S. Sarkar, Institute of Human Development, New Delhi, 2004.

THE current study draws on the philosophical, social and economic context of labour flexibility as articulated by Standing (1999). The failure of state socialism in East Europe and welfare state capitalism in Western Europe due to excessive security in one and lack of income security in an open economy context in the second was reason enough to argue for labour flexibility in the economy. The neoclassical theory blames policy-induced distortions in the product and factor markets for the failure of both systems. Governments and unions raise wages and real costs to the employer, reducing the level of employment. Most of these models favour employment and wage flexibility.

The book provides an interesting review of the Indian literature and argues that most earlier studies looked at the problem of flexibility using aggregate industry data. The authors argue that labour flexibility is best studied at the level of the enterprise and there are few such studies. Hence this book, studying labour market flexibility in Indian manufacturing through a large enterprise survey is a major contribution to the literature.

The main objectives of the study were to understand the following: To what extent did employers follow flexible labour practices? To verify the hypothesis that the extent to which the above is possible depends on the overall state of the labour market. The

low level of employment is due to the labour legislation and unions, though labour markets were not fully de-regulated. What impact did the changes since economic reforms of 1991, have on employment and wages? To what extent did unions and collective bargaining deter employment? What impact does the ideological and administrative differences by states have on flexible labour practices? An overall objective was to elicit labour market policies for the future and examine whether the national statistical systems could incorporate similar frameworks in their regular agenda.

The study enquires into the types of labour employed by enterprises and highlights the variety of flexible labour practices followed in the sample. The second objective was to examine the extent to which this was possible due to the external labour market. Here the authors rely mainly on a review of literature and the National Sample Survey Organisation data on employment. Overall, they argue that the macro level evidence remains mixed, with the growth of employment in non-agriculture mainly concentrated in the informal sector, both slow and of poor quality. The macro analysis is, however, not sufficiently detailed to come up with a clear response to the question of macro-micro linkages or the impact of the macro employment scene on micro employment practices.

The sample enterprises showed positive growth in employment during the period of economic reforms, 1991 to 1998, achieved mainly through increasing the share of non-permanent employment and manual employment through a rise in the share of women workers. The validity and importance of this result for the macro situation is questionable, partly because of the sampling frame and design. The study relied on the sampling frame of the Annual Survey of Industries of 1994-95. First, these are factory sector or relatively large enterprises, theoretically excluding firms with less than ten employees. Second, when the survey was done in 1999 many of the enterprises had either closed down or could not be located and others had dropped to a size below ten workers. The authors point to this limitation in their study, since the omission of some of these enterprises and the fact that surviving enterprises are self selected leads to a selection bias and distortion of the results.

The lack of response of employers regarding wages implied that it was not possible to assess the impact of reforms on the increase in wages for different types of labour. The basic wage was mainly determined by the minimum wage legislations rather than collective bargaining.

Large firms were more likely to be unionized, though both unionized and non-unionized firms increased their capital-intensity. Union absence was more conducive to an increase in employment than the presence of a union. The positive impact of unionization was somewhat higher wages paid to skilled and unskilled workers, other factors being held constant.

State level difference in employment practices reveal that ideologically similar states of Kerala and West Bengal had different rates of growth of employment, with employment in Kerala growing faster. However, this result could be influenced by the overall economic environment rather than ideology and may also be affected by the sampling procedure. These states had a smaller presence of contract labour, but so did three other states – Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. Hence, state level differences in ideology and administrative efficiency did not show any systematic differences in flexible labour practices.

The final objectives about labour market policies and the nature of statistical data to be incorporated into the statistical systems are not dealt with in any great detail in the book. This is somewhat unfortunate since the data and analysis in the book are detailed enough to have allowed for such a discussion.

Various chapters of the book refer to dualism in the labour market and the organised and unorganised sectors. The pessimistic view of liberalization was that it would increase segmentation of the labour market and expand the low-income informal sectors in the economy with increasing use of casual and contract labour, sub-contracting and home-working. It is also noted that only seven per cent of the total employment was in the organised sector, though this percentage would be a little higher for the manufacturing sector. Given this recognition, the study concentrates on a survey of the organised sector. The flexibility of labour practices in these firms is analysed in terms of the nature of informal workers they employ, such as non-permanent, casual and contract. However, the very large segment of the smaller manufacturing units and the sub-contracting units operating in the unorganised segment is not studied. Labour flexibility in Indian manufacturing is most starkly represented in this latter segment. This forms a major limitation of the study and many of the questions raised cannot be fully answered without a study of this segment of the manufacturing sector.

This is not to detract from the usefulness of the book nor the very detailed method employed in the study and analysis. The book is an excellent addition

to the literature on labour market flexibility in India. It is an important and compulsory read for students of economics and labour welfare, both for course work and research.

Jeemol Unni

WATER: Perspectives, Issues, Concerns by
Ramaswamy R. Iyer. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003.

IN the recent past, there has been a steady stream of monographs and specialist articles on water issues in India. However, thus far, there remains a much felt lacuna in broad macro-canvas views on hydraulic management and control in the subcontinent. Fortunately, Ramaswamy Iyer's recent book can be considered timely and our best bet in providing an overview of the multifaceted dimensions of water related dilemmas in India. The book is made up of a collection of articles – some cursory, some with reasonable depth and many others framed just cautiously – that constitute a helpful sweep that is simultaneously introductory and engaging for those interested in water. Iyer, in particular, is most insightful in cogently introducing the oftentimes intractable debates on state water legislations, inter-state wrangles and on the drafting of national water policies, bringing both a useful balance on the subject alongside the facts of the case.

The contrast, for example, between the National Water Policy (1987) and the NWP 2002 is particularly stark. In the former, on paper at least (the drafting of which Iyer, incidentally, was an important player), the Government of India was inclined towards moving from an 'excessive preoccupation' with discrete water projects to recognizing the need for addressing water as a resource. By the NWP 2002, the Vajpayee government has dramatically shifted towards adopting an incoherent patchwork quilt attitude in place of the earlier focus on building some sort of comprehensive approaches to water. Similarly, Iyer provides reasoned opinions on the long and troubled issue on the 'Cauvery dispute'. What is particularly interesting and refreshing, alongside the litany of claims and charges between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, is Iyer's care in pointing out the fact that rising demands on the Cauvery's flows is the central issue.

The sections on large dams in India are not particularly original, but nevertheless provide an excellent summary of the many sides to the debate. More helpful, however, are his views on the Supreme Court

judgement on the Narmada (Sardar Sarovar case) in 2002. Iyer is fairly scathing on the highest court of the land for giving both short shrift to the Narmada Bachao Andolan and to the idea of ecological sustainability. The court, in effect, appeared to deliver a rather short-sighted opinion that will perhaps damage the interests of people in the valley and the environment as well. Other articles in the book on issues such as ground water legislation, water laws, and so on are equally insightful and provide very helpful introductions. I will definitely endorse Iyer's book as a required reference for those dealing with water related issues.

Rohan D'Souza

WORLD SOCIALFORUM: Challenging Empires
edited by Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar and Peter Waterman. The Viveka Foundation, New Delhi, 2004.

GIVEN its ideological moorings, *The Economist* can perhaps be forgiven for prematurely hailing the paling of the anti-globalization movement. In an article in its recent issue, the economic weekly claims that the events of 9/11 and after, especially the ongoing war on Iraq, have overwhelmed the movement. It is a little silly, the article avers, to cry foul over the ills of neoliberal globalization when the scourge of international terrorism, WMD and undemocratic rogue states looms large in the world.

Understandably, *The Economist* has underplayed the amoeba-like, all-inclusive qualities of the anti-globalization movement – the 'movement of movements' that can incorporate any cause within its fold in its demand for global justice. Last year, the opponents of neoliberal globalization quickly reoriented their focus to oppose the war on Iraq, cleverly linking militarization to neoliberal globalization.

One can't help but be bewildered by the diversity of causes embraced by the anti-globalization movement, especially when one peruses the mind-boggling variety of groups attached to the movement's piece de resistance, the World Social Forum (WSF). Women's groups, peasants and farmers, dalits, refugees, anarchists, students, academics, trade unions, environmentalists, guardians of local traditions and cultures and other groups who have presumably been affected by neoliberal globalization, converge in an unwieldy transnational coalition called the WSF.

Attempting a study of the WSF, therefore, is an enormous task. Is the WSF an initiative, a platform, an

organization, a movement or a space? Or is it all of these, all at once? The easiest approach, thus, is the 'reader' – a collection of essays, speeches and articles written by a cross-section of people involved with the issue at hand. Readers are great general introductions, but they are frustrating because they are inconclusive. *Challenging Empires* is a reader on the WSF, and by extension, on the anti-globalization movement. While the editors – academics and researchers with distinguished careers in globalization and civil society-related fields – implicitly believe that the 'reader' format is justified given the diversity of the WSF (which they identify as its strength), this reviewer believes that too much diversity and too many causes can only lead to diffusion and dissipation of energy for the anti-globalization movement. However, as with everything in the arena of the WSF, this too is subject to endless debate.

Challenging Empires offers little that is new or revealing in terms of content, but what makes this effort important is that this is the first comprehensive book on the WSF to come out of India. The idea to do such a book out of India is a good one, given that India is quite the target of neoliberal globalization's bouquets and brickbats, yet there is very little sustained academic critique or contribution on globalization.

One wishes the selection of readings was more judicious and the book a little slimmer, because there are overlaps in many of the articles. It is a bit surprising, though, to note that many of the big names associated with the anti-globalization movement – Naomi Klein, Mary Kaldor, Ann Pettifor, Joseph Stiglitz, Susan George, Nancy Birdsall, among others – are missing from the list of contributors.

Also, rather than have the editors rush to release the book in time for WSF India (January 2004), it might have been more valuable to include experiences and analyses of the Indian event rather than speculation, and in what ways WSF India takes the global movement forward. This becomes especially important because the success of the India event is crucial for the WSF to shake off its tag as an avenue for rich white northerners, and become a truly global movement, inclusive of both North and South.

The book is divided into five thick sections, each devoted to essays and articles relating to one aspect of the WSF. The first section sets out the ideological underpinnings of the WSF, or more appropriately, the anti-globalization movement. The Marxist and dependency theories that form the basis of much of the movement's ideological thrust are duly touched upon

in an interview with noted Marxist economist Samir Amin. Essays on feminism, anarchism and the labour movement, which have influenced the movement follow. But shockingly, there is little on the global movement for environmental protection and ecological sustainability, which perhaps was the first movement to directly link corporate-driven neoliberal policies to a diminishing quality of life.

The second section carries excerpts from diaries of attendees of WSF meetings in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In Section 3 – clearly the most extensive – academics and activists engage critically with the WSF. It also includes a few reflective pieces on the nature of problems inherent in the WSF, as evidenced at Porto Alegre, 2003. Section 4 contains articles on the growth of the anti-globalization movement in India and the reach of the WSF. The final section is freewheeling, with very different perspectives on what lies ahead for the WSF, and more generally for transnational social networks and global civil society.

But ultimately, the WSF is presented as a site for both ‘convergence and contradiction’, as Nikhil Anand writes in his paper on the identity and purpose of the WSF. It is celebrated for its lack of coherence, its diversity and ability to resist definition. One is immediately tempted to ask what lies at the end of this feel-good messiness, this grand idea of the WSF as an open space for debates and disagreements. What is the long-term purpose of the WSF? As some of the essays hint, the ever-widening arena of the WSF has meant more logistical and organizational problems, which may eventually defeat the very idea of the ‘open space’. For instance, there has been a growing attempt by the WSF to exclude anarchist groups and conservative and protectionist anti-globalization activists because they vie with the generally internationalist, egalitarian and peaceful thrust of the WSF.

The WSF is also hailed as a new, people-centred and counter-hegemonic politics that breathes life into the forum’s slogan that ‘another world is possible’. Yet – and my point of contention with the WSF remains this – nowhere in the book can one spot the vision of this other world, except in very general terms. Much of the existing literature on this ‘other world’ suffers from a similar fate. Concepts such as Leslie Sklair’s socialist globalization (2002), Richard Falk’s ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ (1999) or Brecher et al’s ‘globalization from below’ (2000) are introduced in some detail. Yet there is no clear strategy and no roadmap on how to breathe this other world into life. Arundhati Roy says another world ‘is on her way’ and she can

‘hear her breathing’ in her essay on empire, but how will she be born? Will the maddening rasp of public opinion, accumulated at events such as WSF, suffice to create and sustain globalization from below?

Challenging Empires does not set out to answer such questions, but perhaps it is time that the movement stepped down from the euphoria of intercontinental bonhomie and started looking for actionable solutions.

Anupreeta Das

THE SCIENTIFIC TEMPER: An Anthology of Stories on Matters of Science by Anthony R. Michaelis. Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg, 2001.

Anthony Michaelis is well-known in the world of science for his pioneering and untiring efforts to foster interdisciplinary science. The President of the Heidelberg Academy, Prof Gisbert Freiherr zu Putlitz, releasing this remarkable book on 16 October 2001, mentioned that, ‘without doubt, Anthony Michaelis’s greatest merit arises from his founding and subsequent editorship for 20 years of the journal, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*.’ Previously, Dr Michaelis had edited the monthly journal *Discovery* and had also served for 10 years as the science correspondent of the London *Daily Telegraph*. Apart from providing through *ISR*, an effective medium of communication between the natural and social sciences and between technology and the arts, Michaelis worked hard after World War II to rehabilitate German science and re-establish the position of Germany as a ‘Land of Science’.

Having had the privilege of serving on the Editorial Board of *ISR* for over 15 years and having developed a personal friendship with this innovative and far-sighted thinker, I can say without hesitation that he is one of the greatest scientific humanists of our time. He fostered through *ISR* both humanistic science and scientific humanism. His interest was not only in inter-disciplinary science, but also in inter-cultural science. He is not only a great science editor and writer, but also one endowed with a passion for collecting antique scientific instruments like telescopes, microscopes, sextants and antique weights. He has collected in a systematic manner scientific medals and bank notes which feature portraits and achievements of great scientists and engineers. For the benefit of posterity, this invaluable collection is preserved in the Deutsche Museum, Munich (medals) and the Deutsche Technik

Museum, Berlin (scientific bank-notes). Michaelis has often stressed that these collections represent the fusion of arts and science and thereby symbolise the power of interdisciplinary science.

The creativity of Michaelis expresses itself in the structure adopted for this book. The structure involves a new event on each page; there are in all 440 events called 'Titles' providing a glimpse of the rich and varied life Dr Michaelis has led and remarkable in their relevance to contemporary challenges. When I was reading the titles, I said to myself that it would be wonderful if someone were to write using the 'title' format a brief account of all significant anniversaries commemorated during 2003, like the centenaries of the invention or development of aeroplanes, Harley Davidson, Buick and Ford, and the fiftieth anniversaries of the discovery of DNA structure by Watson, Crick, Franklin and Wilkins and the conquest of Mount Everest by Hillary and Tenzing. All these are interdisciplinary efforts and represent the creative outcome of the scientific temper and Michaelis has shown how to present them in a gripping manner.

Title 1 of the book starts with the following quotation from Rudyard Kipling: 'I kept six honest serving men (they taught me all I know). Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who.' Michaelis starts with narrating his adventures with science and scientists during most of the 20th century with the help of the above 'six honest serving men'. The first 24 titles deal with Michaelis's early life and education – the conditions of Jews in Hitler's Germany, his life in England up to his internment on 10 May 1940 as an 'enemy alien' and his marriage to Ann in 1946 and subsequent departure to Australia and New Zealand.

Michaelis's first job (Title 26) was in the area of developing suitable aviation fuels through catalytic cracking. Three years of work at a pilot plant in Manchester did not yield positive results and he moved back to London and got a temporary job in a paint factory. There again his stay was short lived but his description of the social conditions during the war period is both moving and awesome. His next job was as Director of Research of a new chemical laboratory set up by Mr Edgware, Managing Director, Milton Antiseptic. Within three years he had to leave this job since the company was incurring losses.

From 1947 onwards, Michaelis's career took him to pursuits in the area of scientific documentation, including the preparation of a subject index of scientists. He also contributed to the Scientific Film Asso-

ciation and wrote a book on 'Research Films' which was published by the Academic Press of New York..

The descriptions of Anthony Michaelis's wedding with Ann Aikman on 12 November 1946, and of an Australian honeymoon which nearly ended in a plane disaster are fascinating. Finally, both Ann and Anthony found jobs in the University of Sydney, Ann in the Department of Psychology and Anthony in the Department of Aeronautical Engineering. Making research films alone could not provide a living wage and hence he took to writing books. Michaelis describes the criteria which leads to success in book writing – 'an all transcending desire to write the great work, to sacrifice friends and even family, in order to preserve from interference the all too precious time of writing.' A beautiful reproduction is given of the first book by Michaelis titled, 'Research Films in Biology, Anthropology, Psychology and Medicine', published in 1956.

In July 1954, Michaelis decided to return to London. He found great pleasure in being in London again. He developed a close friendship with Sir David Martin, Secretary of the Royal Society of London. Since my election to the Royal Society in 1973, I also had the privilege of getting to know David Martin and I share the great admiration which Michaelis developed for him over a period of 40 years. In whatever job or assignment Michaelis took, we can see the imprint of his genius and commitment to excellence. Thus, he made the programmes of the International Geophysical Year (1956-1959) come alive in the pages of *Discovery*.

I wish to deal with two sections of this remarkable book in greater detail. These are 'Science in India' and 'Antiscience'. Before doing so, I should refer to the concluding title (Title 440) on the theme 'Art – I create alone; for science – we work together'. Memorable contributions in art, literature and music are made by individuals. In contrast, working together in interdisciplinary teams has led to some of the greatest achievements in science. For example, the eradication of smallpox in 1977 was the result of the worldwide collaboration between science and medicine set in motion by the World Health Organisation.

In my own work in agricultural research, I have observed that seemingly impossible tasks can be achieved if we generate the power of partnership and team work. For example, in wheat for far too long I concentrated on selecting the 'winner' by segregating populations on the basis of the excellence of the characteristics of individual plants. This resulted in an yield gain of 10 to 20 per cent. However, when I shifted to selecting plants on the basis of population perform-

ance, the yield gain went up by 200 to 300 per cent. Hence, I applaud Michaelis for choosing ‘working together’ as the topic for the last title of the book, since this quality forms the core of scientific temper.

Let me now revert to the portion dealing with science in India (Titles 116-127) and to anti-science (Titles 202-204). The anti-science section deals with the mood which prevailed at the 136th meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) held at Boston in 1969. Some of the points made at this meeting have even greater relevance today. For example, the students objected most fiercely to arms research at their own university, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where a novel rocket was then being designed. Although only a single missile, it had the capacity to carry four nuclear bombs and each one of these could be targeted independently to a different site. The students asked, ‘How can arms makers discuss arms control?’ The same can be said today of the UN Security Council whose five permanent members have the largest number of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Rabelais once said, ‘Science is but the conscience of the soul’. We should not allow this conscience to be extinguished. This is why Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein who launched the Pugwash movement in their famous manifesto of 1955 appealed: ‘Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death.’

Another interesting event relating to the 1969 AAAS meeting was the lecture of Margaret Mead on pollution and hunger in the midst of great affluence. Mead said at that meeting, ‘If America wants to play the political part in the world she wanted to assume, we cannot isolate ourselves from the rest of the world and we have to show that there is no longer any hunger and malnutrition in the USA.’ This is as true today when the Bush administration has refused to ratify most global conventions relating to climate, biodiversity, oceans and so on. In particular, the refusal to adopt the guidelines provided in the Kyoto Protocol of the Climate Convention has serious implications for the poor countries and poor in all nations, since they have limited coping capability against adverse changes in precipitation and sea level. The world needs more Margaret Meads who can keep the voices of sanity and humanism alive.

Let me conclude with a reference to Michaelis’s tryst with India. The very title of this book, ‘The Scientific Temper’ is a quote from Jawaharlal Nehru. His

admiration for Indian scientists is evident from the following statement related to his visit to the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay. ‘I could only marvel at the ingenuity of the Indian scientists and engineers who had designed and constructed this high technology example of chemical engineering without any European or American engineering help.’ Michaelis has also described his visits to the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station and to several other scientific establishments in equally ecstatic terms. Referring to India’s progress in nuclear science and technology, Michaelis remarks, ‘It was all part of the atomic master plan, due to the genius of a physicist, Homi Bhabha, to produce electric power and a bomb, if the need arose.’

Michaelis’s close friends in India not only included nuclear and space scientists, but also great scholars and thinkers like Romila Thapar and the late Sarvapalli Gopal. Tributes to Jawaharlal Nehru’s concept of ‘Science for a free India’ and the all-embracing ‘Scientific Temper’ occur at many places in this book. The following quotation from a lecture by Nehru helps to understand Nehru’s fascination with science and scientists. ‘If modern life depends on science and technology, then we must seize hold of them, understand them and apply them.’

This is what is happening in India today. Fortunately, all subsequent prime ministers of India have continued this faith in science as a major instrument for removing illiteracy and superstition and poverty and disease. The present Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee added, ‘*Jai Vigyan*’ (i.e., glory to science) to Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri’s slogan, ‘*Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan*’ (glory to soldiers and farmers).

All in all, this book will remain for ever a tribute to both scientific temper and inter-disciplinary science. It will be appropriate to conclude with the following poem of Ranier Maria Rilke:

Again and again in history
Some special people wake up
They have no ground in the crowd
They move to broader laws
They carry strange customs with them
and demand room for bold audacious actions
The future speaks ruthlessly through them
They change the world.

Michaelis has certainly helped to change the world of science through his demonstration of the power of inter-disciplinary science.

M.S. Swaminathan F.R.S.

Whatever.

Whenever.

Wherever.

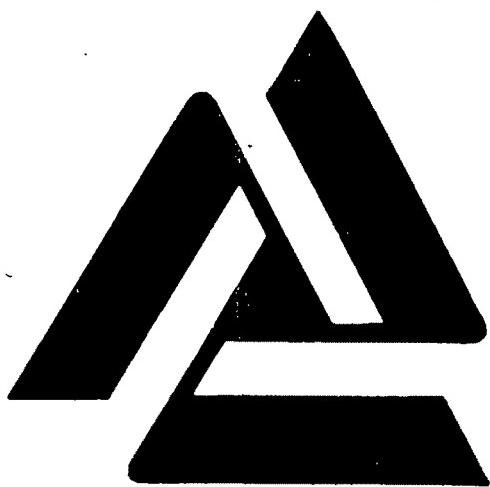
At AFL, we move anything and everything to anywhere.

Now tell us what, when and where.



Where movement is a science

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Comment

Why might women support religious 'fundamentalism'?

WOMEN'S support to religious fundamentalism could be explained with the help of notions of women as objects and subjects of community identity, conditioned as much by patriarchal values as men, their interests so intrinsically connected to the community that thinking of individual or collective interests may amount to blasphemy. Also, making an assumption that all women would like to oppose fundamentalism implies rallying behind universal notions of womenhood and sisterhood, and romanticizing women as universal peace-seekers.

In this paper, I would like to explore women's identities, interests and values as complex interactive elements in the multitude of intersections and overlapping themes of fundamentalism. I will attempt to analyze a few key intersections of religion, nationalism, caste, class, gender and community identity in India with a special focus on current trends in Hinduism to understand the layers of women's support to religious fundamentalism. I will also attempt to link the growth of religious fundamentalism with increasing attempts to control women.

While approaching religio-spirituality, we should make a distinction between the values of the religio-spiritual realm and their practice. The growth of values is associated more with metaphysical aspects of the religion and is seen as the preserve of enlightened and unattached spiritual persons who could devote themselves fully to emancipate the soul. The practice of these values is considered to be closer to ordinary mortals. The intricate world of attachments in which women live makes them ‘incompatible’ to the demands of a spiritual world which is highly valued, powerful, and a typically male domain. Some women may strategize an escape from attachments and create a religio-spiritual space for themselves by renouncing their sexuality and sex roles through *sanyas* (renunciation of attachments) (Babb 1988, p. 280-285) and affiliations with religious movements and organizations looking for women in their fold to gain broader legitimacy.

To use Gaitskell’s analysis of South African women’s conversion to Christianity through the Christian Mission Stations (Gaitskell 1990, p. 253), these organizations provide women an alternative set of protectors and economic base which makes escape from the drudgery of life as a daughter, sister, wife or widow possible (Basu 1999, p. 200). In India, right wing organizations like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and others, which frequently invoke the goddesses and female spiritual gurus of the past and use women in liturgy have attracted many Hindu *sanyasins* (female religious mendicants/propONENTS/ascetics) like Ritambhara or Uma Bharati. The invocations are not only a bait for women but also a reminder to the women affiliates to see the scope for their philosophy and activity in supporting everything that these organizations are doing, including promoting hostility towards faiths and people perceived to be damaging Hinduism.

Talking of the Sangh Parivar, Arundhati Roy says, ‘its utter genius lies in its apparent ability to be all things to all people at all times’ (Roy 1999, p. 181). A broad understanding of ‘violence’ beyond the direct physical and mental abuse and as produced in people’s perceptions may help us in seeing the image of the Sangh Parivar as it exists in the minds of middle class, poor and home-bound women. This perception of violence is linked to the notions of religious domination and subordination, which subvert the chances of survival of another value system. For example, beef eating, spread of non-Hindu values, unemployment,

religious conversion, inter-religious marriages, adoption of a Hindu child, etc. may be taken as attempts to denigrate the status and spoil the purity of Hindu religion. Therefore, these may be perceived as socio-economic and cultural violence against the ‘Hindu’.

The Sangh Parivar has articulated a feminist politics that reflects upon such perceptions and created ‘a space for personal accomplishment to which unskilled working class women and frustrated middle class women [across caste, particular religious community and region] might be attracted’ (Sahgal and Davis 1992, p. 9, text in brackets mine). While taking on the persona of a religious saviour, the Sangh seeks to mobilize women against the ‘perceived perpetrators of the violence’. The counter violence or support to fundamentalist organizations is seen by these women as an issue of religio-political identity and collective empowerment to oppose ‘occupation of minds and cultures’.

Kandiyoti in her paper ‘Islam and Patriarchy’, talks about women resisting the old normative order slipping away without any empowering alternatives and women pressurize men to live up to their obligations to provide protection in exchange of submissiveness and propriety as part of patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1992, p. 36). The exchange of submissiveness and propriety for protection brings forth the issue of women’s bodies being treated as sites of community identity in a patriarchal society (Kannabiran 1996, p. 32-33). Submissiveness and propriety by these bodies is essential for patriarchal honour.

In India, for example, Ritambhara’s speeches, marked by incitements to reclaim male honour, remind men to live up to their part of the bargain. Similarly, when Uma Bharati asks women to play a political role without compromising their ‘basic nature’ (Llewellyn 2001), she is reminding that impropriety by female bodies would damage the Hindu honour which corresponds to male honour. The Sangh Parivar seeks to secure women’s support by playing on the tensions between ‘deeply ingrained images and expectations of male-female roles and changing realities of everyday life’ (Kandiyoti 1992, p. 36), which put a demand on women to step in the public space. By using the lack of alternatives before women, it attempts to consensualize women’s investment in patriarchal values and simultaneously puts conditions on her public engagement.

The offer of male protection comes with (*i*) the condition that women will have to become consenting custodians of patriarchal values, and (*ii*) an implicit guarantee that they will get the residual power and

benefits that would accrue from their support to the Hindu male communal coercion (Sangari 1999, p. 398-408). The perceived notions of danger and security and the chance to exercise residual power through patriarchal bargains may make this offer lucrative for many women (Jeffery 1998, p. 223).

According to Moghissi, fundamentalism is 'an attitude towards time'. It proposes 'an ideal past, initial conditions' or 'golden age' which contrasts to the present and can be retrieved... (Moghissi 1999, p. 69). All may not view the fundamentalist form of return to the golden age as conservative or retrogressive. For example, by linking fundamentalist space with religion and women's welfare, the Sangh Parivar makes it possible for a woman to occupy public space and for her family to explain their daughter's feminism as a form of *sewa* (Sahgal 2000, p. 198). This may appear as liberal to many.

Similarly, in the context of Muslims, 'attempts by disadvantaged groups to rise in ritual status by strict adherence to "tradition" or the Shariat are not seen by them as a return to medievalism but in fact as symbols of achievement' (Pandey in Chhachhi 1988, p. 23). So, acceptance in a social group closed so far or the move upwards in the social ladder may appear progressive and create an incentive for both poor men and women to support fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism also has a unique feature of constructing its own version of the 'true identity'. In India, this is evident from the Sangh's move to homogenize identity by disregarding the variety of 'Hindu religions', which have existed within the concept of Hinduism (Romila Thapar 1989). An interrogation of gender, class and caste in India reveal that the Sangh is promoting a uniformly brahminized, class-based, transregional modernity and a principle of formal gender equality located in a dichotomous upper caste practice.

The impact is visible in the spread of practices like dowry in states like Tamil Nadu (Kapadia 2002), wearing of *sindur* and *mangalsutra* and practice of karwa chauth by Hindu women irrespective of the region and culture. In the homogenization process, women's space as well as capacity to bargain is being curtailed further by emphasizing brahminized feminine constructs and collective identity (Basu 1998, p. 175-76). Traits like self-sacrificing motherhood and devoted wife are now also being channelized towards building and nurturing a Hinduised social cohesion. In this brahminized, class-based, transregional modernization process, women may not

have the space to think of separating their identities from the image of the 'homogenized community'.

The Indian national movement, beginning in the 19th century, was imbued with simultaneous processes of socio-religious reform, specifically attempts to improve women's condition within Hinduism. These attempts could be attributed to (i) initially, a desire to emulate what the reformers considered modern, i.e., the models of womanhood and conjugalities of the colonizers, and (ii) later, the need to engage the wider masses in protesting against the colonizers. It would not have been possible to engage women in the protest without raising the issues which restrict their participation. During this period activists like Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Joshi, Kailashbashini Debi, Tarabai Shinde, Haimavati Sen, Saraladevi, among others, challenged the patriarchal system by identifying the power dynamics which make man-woman relationships unequal (Chakravarti 1998, Sen 2000, Sarkar 1997, Omvedt 1980). Though dalit leaders started talking about caste, cultural, regional and class differences, but on the whole women were treated as a homogeneous entity.

The national movement identified the humiliated and colonized land with the image of a subjugated Hindu woman's body – her body, sari and adornment encompassing present India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and parts of Afghanistan and Myanmar. The image stays even after 56 years of Partition. It also plays an important role in the projects of Hindu nationalism. The image of the motherland has been used to exhort proliferation of female deity or Shakti cult among women who find the concept of shakti empowering. The Sangh Parivar sees partition as a mutilation of the sacred body of the mother and holds Muslims responsible for this act of 'desecration' (Sarkar, p. 163-190 and 268-288). By laying claim to Hindu nationalist feminine icons and linking them to female power, patriotism, partition and a dream of *Akhand Bharat* the Sangh has successfully managed to mobilize Hindu women to support the cause of avenging partition.

Women's support to the communalized politics of the Sangh Parivar also needs to be looked at from vantage point of individual women's politics to benefit from the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution as well as BJP attempts to enlarge its vote constituencies. The BJP has much to gain by keeping women's collective political empowerment within the bounds of socio-historically gendered subjectivities. However, any such analysis must also keep in purview the socio-historical factors.

Women in India have long been active in various types of social and political movements – at national, regional and local levels. They were engaged in grassroots caste-based politics during the Nehruvian period when political power was mainly with the upper castes.

The emergence of ‘backward castes’ and farmers’ parties brought in many other groups of women in politics. Throughout, mainstream politics neither allowed an orientation towards gender issues, nor allowed women to use their agency in collaboration with women’s activists to actively raise and interrogate issues of gender inequalities. If anything the incorporation of gender issues has been considered divisive in the mass nationalist/caste/community building processes and movements. The controlled participation did help some individual women to ameliorate their own situation but systemic gender inequalities have remained unaddressed (Jeffery 1998, p. 222) and women’s orientation towards collaborative agency has been constrained.

Women’s support to religious fundamentalism reflects a situation where women are caught between emancipatory aspirations and inherited notions of ideal womanhood. Notwithstanding multiple factors influencing women’s support to fundamentalism and the impossibility of talking about a common protest against religious fundamentalism, it is possible to turn this ‘situation of being caught’ into a ‘situation of struggle’. Not by ascription to the universal notions of womenhood and sisterhood but by recognizing women’s multiple realities of and exploring questions such as, ‘is there a dissatisfaction with the nation building processes because they have not addressed the issues of gender, ideology, power and identity’, ‘are the modernization processes being seen by women as socio-cultural and economic devaluation of women’, and so on. The contested relationships between women, religion, society, state, culture, nationalism need to be theorized afresh in the public space and ‘discursive and related historical frameworks alike need to be (re)addressed’ (Rouse 1998, p. 69).

Nisha

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Backpage

WHAT should have been a proud moment for showcasing India's democratic credentials paradoxically brought out the worst in our political class. The Supreme Court decision in the Best Bakery case directing a retrial and fresh investigation, a sacking of the public prosecutor and a shifting of the case from Gujarat to Maharashtra is unusual, for rarely have we witnessed such a clear admission of the breakdown of the judicial machinery of the state. In more civilized times this would have led to the resignation of the Gujarat chief minister, failing which the government should have been dismissed.

But Narendra Modi lived upto his reputation as a statistical outlier. Unrepentant about his continuing failure to institute a sense of security in the state's beleaguered and 'terrorised' minorities, he went on the offensive and instead blamed the 'liberal' media and meddlesome do-gooders for not letting the state settle down. Evidently, justice for 'victims' constitutes no part of Modi's *Garve Gujarat*. Nor, despite invocations to *raj-dharma*, for his senior colleagues in the party who both continue to defend him and remain blind to the institutional damage to what was once the country's fastest growing state.

Gujarat, in many ways, is a continuing story of denial. Defenders of Modi may have a point when they claim that the aftermath of all major communal conflagrations have been no different. From Malliana in the early '70s to Gujarat 2002, no notable has suffered the consequences of alleged involvement in rioting. Nevertheless, the brazenness with which the investigation, prosecution and judicial machinery has been subverted does mark a new low in India's politico-institutional culture.

Even more shocking was the death of 22 indigent women and children in Lucknow, the prime minister's constituency. Everything about this incident – organizing a free distribution of saris by an acolyte of Lalji Tandon, Atalji's election agent, a few days before Vajpayee was to file his nomination in wilful disregard of both the 'moral code of conduct' as also the restrictions on assembly (Section 144) in force; throwing saris to poor women in a manner reminiscent of throwing alms to beggars if not food to stray dogs; the claim by the administration that it was 'unaware' of the function, this despite week-long advertisements in the local press – smacks of callousness. If trampling under-

foot the 'dignity' of indigent people was not disgusting enough, the manner in which the bodies were stacked in the mortuary van is sufficient indication that for our officialdom and the political class the poor do not count as human beings.

Just look at the way everyone involved denied complicity and worse. Lalji Tandon shifted the blame to the organizers, claiming that he did not even know them, as blatant a lie as we have heard in recent times. His party claimed that since this was not an 'official' function, they cannot be held responsible. Also, since their candidate had still to file his nomination papers, there was no technical violation of the election code.

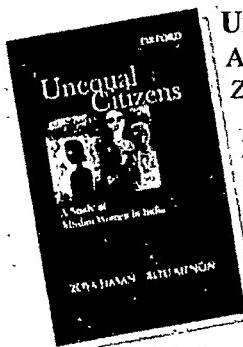
More surprising was the reaction of Mulayam Singh Yadav, UP Chief Minister. Taking, what he perceived as the high road, he appealed to all concerned not to politicise the issue, that what had happened was 'unfortunate', a 'tragedy', adding that 'such things happen'. Maybe what he really intended was to shift the blame to the victims, their greed for free goodies being responsible for the stampede and death. Or possibly, since compensation has been announced to the families of victims, this should be the end of the matter.

Expectedly, other opposition parties, those with neither the BJP-NDA or the Samajwadi Party, jumped into the fray. This seemed too good an opportunity to embarrass the prime minister. Yet, the differential stances of the Congress, which hinted at the complicity between the SP and the BJP, and the CPI(M) which foregrounded the role of the BJP tagging on the SP only as an aside, makes clear that neither the victims nor the political culture which makes such tragedies possible are of concern.

Both Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, in different ways, reflect the coarsening of our democratic political culture and discourse. With interest increasingly shifting to 'feel good' and highlighting positive stories, the poor and the marginalized may even be losing their value as electoral vote banks. Without holding any brief for the earlier populism, at least the less well-off were not seen as a drag, holding back progress. As long as our elite, and our political representatives, continue with their myopic worldviews, denying the poor their dignity and agency, there is little likelihood of 'India Shining'.

7
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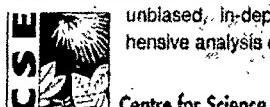
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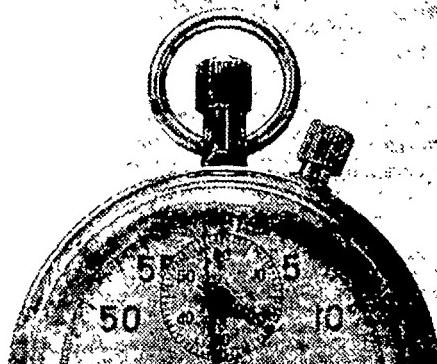
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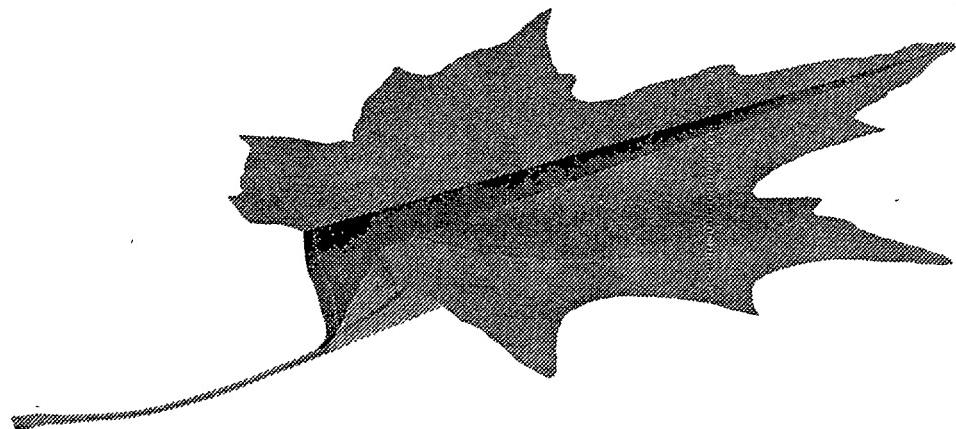
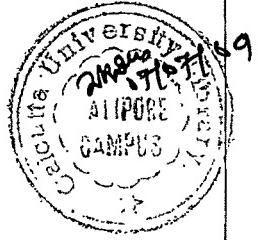
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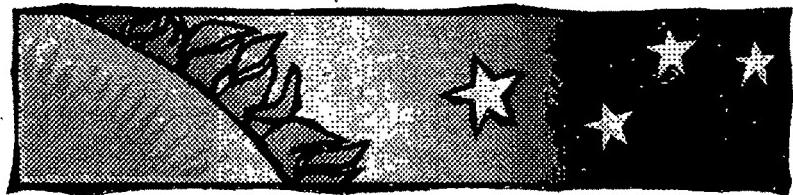
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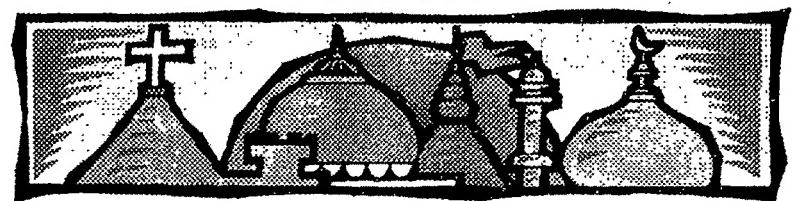
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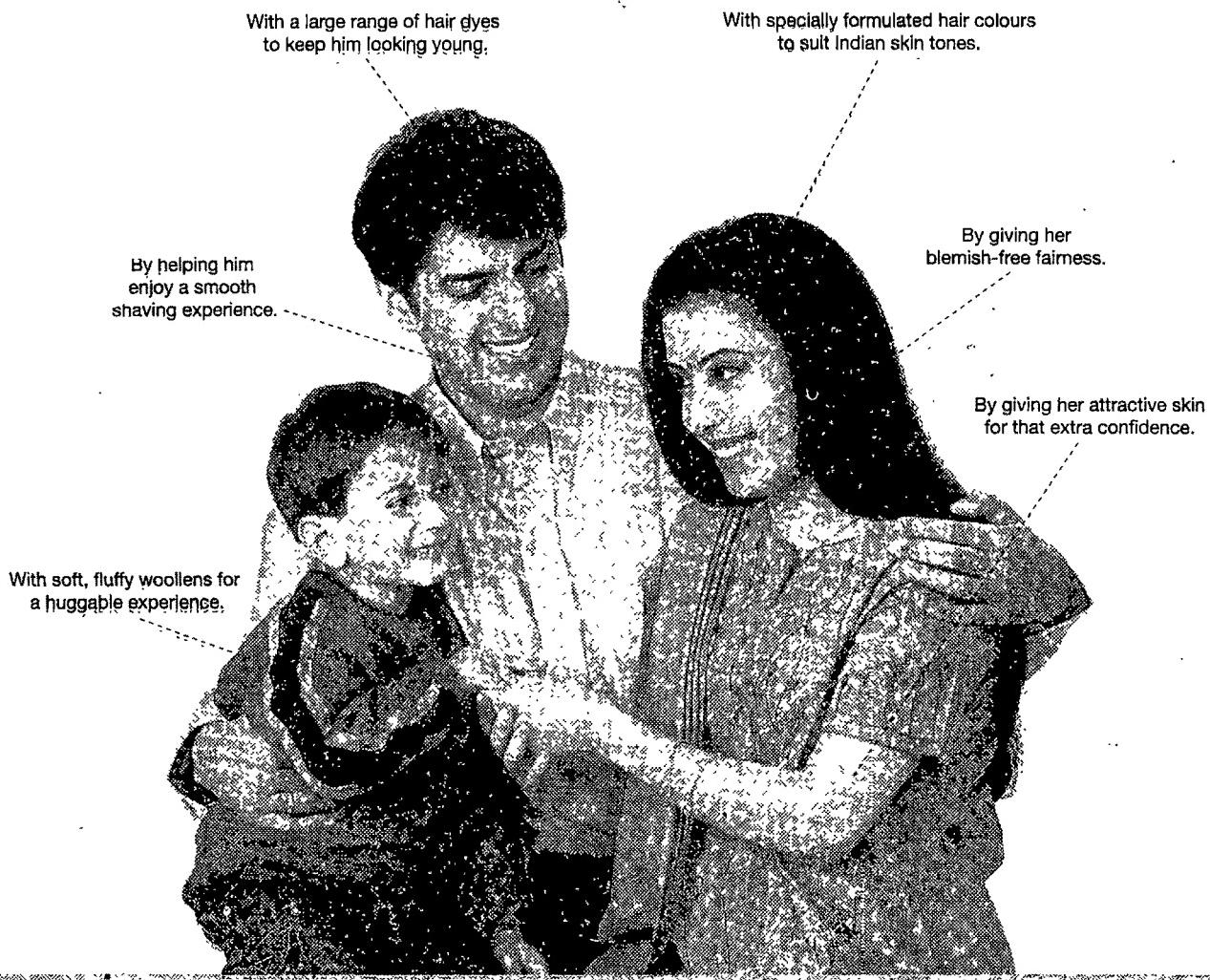
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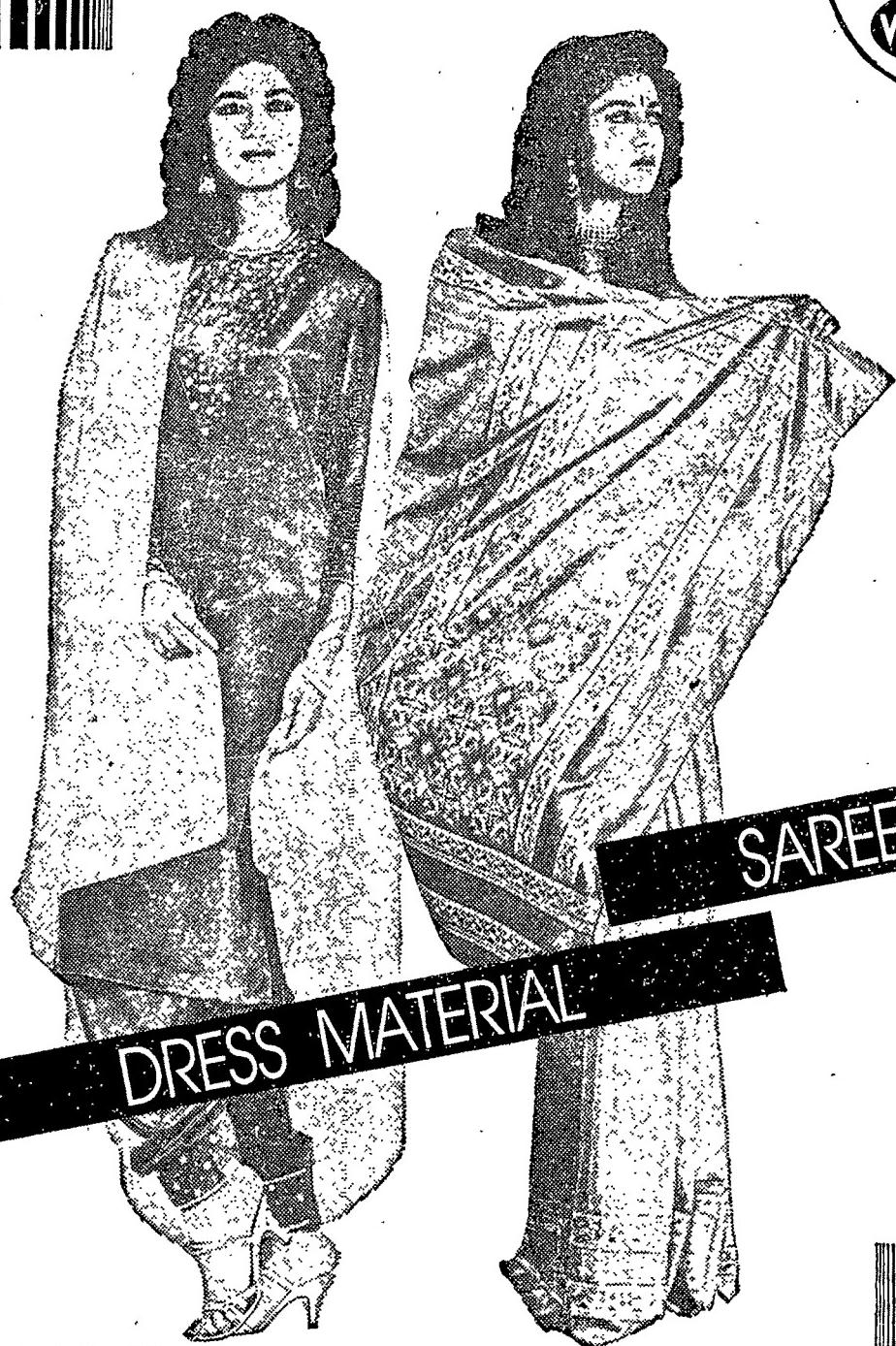
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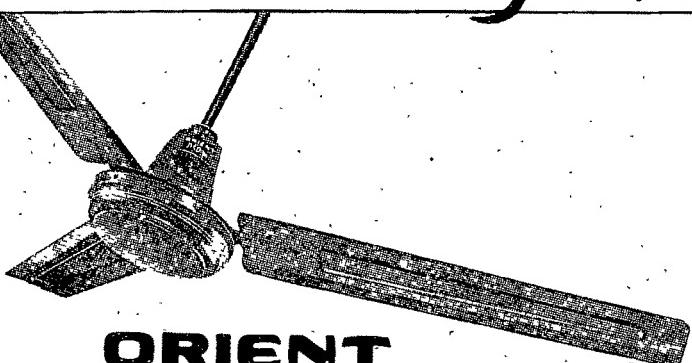
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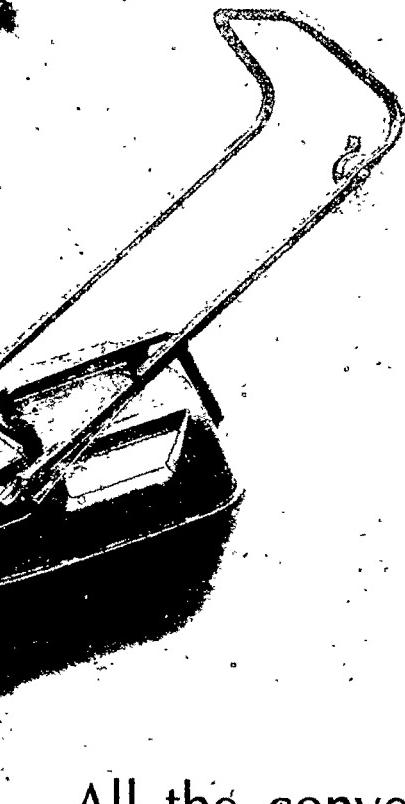


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Indian-Americans

and the motherland

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The problem

DESPITE a long history of exchange and migration, it is only recently that Indians abroad have started attracting attention. Unlike the Chinese who, despite sharing the Indian obsession with self, the people and the land, have long had a policy framework for overseas Chinese, leveraging the expatriate community for ‘national’ ends, the Indians have so far failed to even comprehensively map the settlements/communities abroad, far less integrate them in an overarching vision.

Possibly this is because the first substantial migrations abroad were part of the colonial, indentured labour arrangements of the 19th century. Those dragooned into the plantations of East and South Africa, the West and East Indies, were after all lower caste and class peasants and labourers, ‘unworthy’ of the attention of our rulers and elite. In the countries of their residence they usually occupied the lower rung. Little surprise that in a status conscious people, they rarely figured in the mental landscape. Only after Gandhi organized the *girmityas* in South Africa in the early years of the last century did the situation start changing.

The situation today is very different, primarily because of the reported successes of the diaspora in the Silicon Valley or that of Indian professionals more generally in the West. Equally important is the flow of remittances from the Gulf. Suddenly the overseas Indian, the *Pravasi Bharatiya* is the toast of the town. Not only is Bollywood now making films to primarily

cater to these audiences, the government is facilitating networks of People of Indian Origin (PIOs) as advocacy groups to influence policy in the countries of their residence. Alongside celebrating a *Pravasi Diwas*, for the first time the Indian state has initiated the policy of dual citizenship, of course only for the visibly successful in the West. It appears that more than success at home, recognition abroad is now the dominant marker of value.

And yet, the current excitement with the NRI is inordinately tilted towards the ‘successful’ expatriate in the West, essentially the UK and North America. The millions in the Gulf continue to be valued only as a market and a source of steady remittances. The early lot, the first stream of contract labour abroad, remain poor cousins, even in countries where their numbers have given them a political role. Remember Fiji and its deposed prime minister of Indian origin; Mahendra Chaudhury’s attempts to drum up support in his country of origin came a miserable cropper. Or what Idi Amin did to the Indian community in Uganda nearly three decades back. And who remembers Cheddi Jagan in Guyana?

In a country and a culture coming to terms with globalization and seeking to define a presence beyond its borders, both this lack of knowledge and a distorted engagement is troubling. Even in the West, all that we seem to be aware of, and revel in, are the Indians who have made good, not the many more working at low

end jobs or in the shadowy grey market. Equally distressing is our naive belief that all those of Indian origin should subserve Indian interests, as defined by the regime in power. Or that what they need and desire are dollops of Indian (read Hindi and Hindu) culture.

Nothing captures this distorted understanding and relationship better than the world of knowledge and ideas. The first flush of professional outmigration – engineers, doctors, scientists – was treated as a brain drain, how the Indian state through its educational infrastructure was subsidizing development abroad. Often, those who settled abroad were classified as selfish and self-serving, betraying the homeland. Now, not only are they more valued but it is their intellectual labour which defines research fashion and priorities. Be it literature or films, social science theorizing or managerial/entrepreneurial models – experience abroad is valorized and sought to be transplanted back home. Why, even Sanatan Dharma – the rituals, temple architecture – is increasingly being moulded in the image of the guru/cult abroad.

It is insufficiently appreciated that the diaspora abroad is helping construct a diaspora at home, the non-resident Indian creating a strata of resident non-Indians. At its best, the exchange can and should contribute to enthusing dynamism into a static culture; it can also lead to a strata of ‘successful’ Indians seceding from the rest of the country with the children of our elite firmly set on outmigration, not just for jobs and

earning, but even school education, their consumption patterns and lifestyle choices modelled on the ‘richer’ cousins who have ‘made it’. And now with the outsourcing jobs in call centres altering even speech patterns and accents it is worth thinking about the ‘new’ Indian in the making. In itself this process is only to be expected in an increasingly integrating world. Nevertheless, as the Mahatma repeatedly reminded us, unless we are firmly planted in our soil, the winds of change can blow us off our feet.

It is unclear how these processes of exchange and interculture will define and influence us, particularly as Indian communities settle in diverse settings. How often do we think about the Indian communities in Malaysia or the more recent settlements in Thailand, Japan and South Korea. As we move beyond capital flows and lobby groups and the inordinate attention showered on the successful groupings in the West, we will be forced to redefine not only our notions/models of success, but work through processes of integration and exclusion, even re-imagine received ideas of nation, loyalty and belonging. We who continue to debate the ‘foreign’ origins of our prime ministerial candidates and apply a cricket-loyalty test on our Muslim communities need to ask ourselves the meaning of dual citizenship and inviting Indian origin citizens of other countries to contribute to the homeland.

This issue of *Seminar* engages with questions thrown up by the diaspora and diasporic imagination.

Labour and longing

VINAY LAL

THE Indian diaspora is today an incontestable fact of world culture. As the world drifts towards globalization, and India itself enters into the world economy, shaking off its notorious Hindu rate of growth for the decidedly mixed blessings of what might be called a new coolitude,¹ the Indian diaspora is beginning to occupy a greater place in transnational economic and cultural exchanges. How-

ever, to some observers, the Indian diaspora has had, perhaps most visibly thorough cultural artefacts, something of a global presence over the last few decades.

Among the most visible signs today of India's diasporic presence are its Silicon Valley millionaires, the graduates of its IITs, and its other professional elite such as doctors. But before all of this there was the literature of the Indian diaspora, the gradual emergence of Indian food as a global cuisine, and the nearly ubiquitous Patel Brothers grocery store. Anyone

I. The term 'coolitude' is borrowed from Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora* (London: Anthem Press, 2002). I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Anindita Nag with library research, and thank the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) for inviting me to deliver an earlier

version of this paper as the keynote address at their conference on the Indian diaspora in Queens, New York, March 2004.

with more than a modicum of familiarity with Great Britain will recognize that the power which colonized India has finally, owing to the pervasive influence of Indian food, become something of a civilized place. If I may invoke Somerset Maugham, one no longer has to eat an English breakfast three times a day in order to eat well in Britain. The curry invasion of Britain has been well documented, and newer episodes in the 'curry wars' are being written every month.

In the last decade or more, V.S. Naipaul, Shiva Naipaul, Anita Desai, and the Ved Mehta of Daddyji and Mummyji fame have been joined by Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Vassanji, Harold Sonny Ladoo, Rohinton Mistry, K.S. Maniam, Subramani, Cyril and David Dabydeen, and Agha Shahid Ali, to name only some of the more prominent poets and novelists who have transformed our understanding of English and its idioms.

Yet literature and Indian food are not the only telltale signs of the globalization of the Indian diaspora. Though the United States is only now discovering that there is a cinema of mass appeal other than Hollywood, Hindi films have had a marked presence in the southern hemisphere since the early days of decolonization. The diaspora is no longer very far from Bollywood's horizons either, as films such as *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, *Pardes*, *Jeans*, and *Kal Ho Na Ho* amply demonstrate.

That the diaspora of Bollywood's imagination has moved from Mauritius to the United States is another matter, and it gestures at some of the themes which shall be the subject of my observations. While scholars of the Indian diaspora have hitherto professed no great disinclination to speak of it in the singular, it is becoming

increasingly clear that the term 'the Indian diaspora' obscures as much as it reveals. One might argue that there is no compelling reason to jettison the term, and that though one can reasonably ask what makes the highly dispersed Indian diaspora 'Indian', one can also, just as reasonably, point to the numerous ways in which a sense of 'Indianness' can be evoked.

What is it that is common, for example, among Canadian Sikhs, Tamil-speaking Indo-Mauritians, the Indo-Guyanese of New York, the Bhojpuri-speaking peoples in Lambaria (Fiji), the thrice-emigrated Gujaratis displaced from Uganda and Kenya, Indo-Fijians now settled in Australia and New Zealand, the Malayalis of the Gulf states, Malaysian Indians, Punjabi-Mexican Americans, Indo-Fijian Canadians, and the affluent Indian elites of North America? The US-based Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, or GOPIO in its more familiar acronym, has obviously dwelled on the notions of 'origins' to draw out what it takes to be common to Indians dispersed around the world.

But what does it mean to say that the origins of a seventh-generation Indo-Mauritian, whose ancestors may have arrived at the shores of this island by the first boat in 1834, and who has never had any first-hand familiarity with the land of his ancestors, lie in India? Will the origins of Indo-Mauritians 300 years from now also lie in India? What kind of histories of continuity are assumed by claims of 'origins'?

Some scholars will, for good reasons, seek to disavow the idea of origins. The quest for 'origins', as we have found out all too often, is often chimerical; it is also laced with political intent, since arguments mounted on the back of 'origins' become the

vehicle for claiming primacy and privileges. The idea of 'origins', it is obvious, excludes as much as it includes: if the hybrid forms of culture that have emerged in recent years are any indication, 'origins' is bound to become an increasingly unreliable index to 'Indianness'. I suspect, moreover, that the globalized forms of what passes for Indian culture, from the immensely popular (among middle-class Indian families in the US) dance form of bharatanatyam to the samosa and the Bollywood film might aid us more in giving shape to the notion of an Indian diaspora than the real or alleged origins of those who claim membership in the diaspora.

In speaking, then, of the Indian diaspora, it appears that certain elementary distinctions are in order. As I shall suggest shortly, these distinctions are of considerable importance in understanding which diasporic communities are more liable to suffer from political, economic, or social disabilities, and which of these communities are clearly subject to acute or chronic forms of racial discrimination, injustice, and even systemic forms of oppression. One can speak, with the obvious proviso that there are exceptions to neat forms of categorization, of the 'old' and the 'new' diasporas, the first pre-eminently a diaspora of the 19th century, the latter largely of the 20th century; the former also coincides with the diaspora of the 'south', just as the latter appears to coincide with the diaspora of the 'north'.

The truly heroic saga of 19th century indentured labourers who made their way to Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, Fiji, South Africa and elsewhere has only in the last two decades received sustained scholarly attention, and the Government of India's interest in this diaspora, or

even acknowledgment of its existence, is even more recent. One well-known scholar of an earlier generation not inaccurately described indentured labour as another name for slavery,² and I suspect that Indians, who have seldom had social intimacy with black populations, have always been inclined to view slavery as a phenomenon which describes the experiences of black people rather than their own experiences. That is one reason, among others, why the older diaspora has largely been obscured from visibility, and indeed its very invisibility is itself a sign of its vulnerability to forms of oppression.

The new diaspora, now eagerly courted by the Government of India, is represented, to a substantial degree, by professional elites who have carved a niche for themselves in the countries of the affluent north. Yet the porousness and tentativeness of these distinctions between 'old' and 'new', 'south' and 'north', lower-class and upper-class, 'coolie' and professional, 'rural' and 'urban' becomes at once evident on somewhat closer scrutiny. The so-called coolies of the 'old' diaspora appear to have their counterpart, the enthusiasm of Thomas Friedman and Gurcharan Das notwithstanding,³ in the cybercoolies recruited among the young men and women of India who, without leaving India, have now become the latest incarnation of the diasporic sensibility. They are at least as much exiled from 'village India' as Indians settled in the diaspora.

2. Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

3. Thomas Friedman's recent visit appears to have left a lasting impression on the *New York Times* columnist. See his 'Small and Smaller', *New York Times* (4 March 2004), p. A31; idem, 'The Great Indian Dream', *New York Times* (11 March 2004), p. A29; and, idem, 'Origin of Species', *New York Times* (14 March 2004), p. A12.

Similarly, if we recall that the older diasporas comprised not only indentured labourers but traders, then it is by no means idle to suggest that some of the vanguard of the new diaspora, who have been among the most enthusiastic advocates of globalization, are themselves anticipated in the figure of the Gujarati trader whose networks were as vast as any which are today associated with global and corporate elites.

There is, then, much less certainty in our characterizations of Indian diasporas as 'old' and 'new' than we are wont to imagine, but nonetheless the distinction will not go away. One of the many reasons why the Indian populations of Fiji, Trinidad, South Africa, Guyana and other portions of the 'old' diaspora cannot seamlessly be assimilated, either through a category such as 'origins' or by invocations to some broad conceptions of 'Indian civilization', into a wider story of the Indian diaspora of which the US, Canada, and Australia partake is that the Government of India has never been much inclined to bestow attention on the older Indian diaspora.

It is no accident that the term NRI (the Non-Resident Indian), which is now often cleverly passed off as a reference to any overseas Indian, only came into usage much less than two decades ago, and has acquired something of a magical resonance in the last decade when India finally became committed to the opening of its economy to foreign investments, the reduction of tariffs, and the gradual elimination of the license raj. When we consider that the United States only opened its doors to immigrants from India and other countries in 1965 with the passage of a new Immigration and Naturalization Act, and that a professional and affluent Indian

elite, which in time would have both the means and the desire to support the economic liberalization of India, was first established in the 1980s, it becomes easier to understand why NRI became at the same time a term of approbation, indeed a sign of something to which the middle-class Indian could aspire. The entire destiny of the middle-class Indian consisted in effecting a transformation into the NRI – and, to be sure, the NRI was never then a category that referenced all overseas Indians, but rather only Indians in the affluent North, and most particularly those settled in the United States.

The recent Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas gatherings in New Delhi are similarly deceptive exercises which invoke an ecumenical conception of the Indian diaspora that, to the contrary, the Government of India has almost always disowned. It is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that the Indian government, and no less the educated elites of India, were oblivious to the presence of an older Indian diaspora and were predisposed towards viewing it as a reminder of everything that India had to leave behind if it wished to be seen as a nation marching towards progress and development. Since political correctness, as much as the aspiration to be viewed as a great power, largely prevents the Government of India from openly embracing outright discrimination with respect to overseas Indians, the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas gatherings have perforce sought to convey the impression that Mother India will take unto its bosom all of its dispersed children, howsoever poor or wealthy, the older ones as much as the younger ones.⁴

4. For a more extended discussion of the politics of the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas gatherings, see Vinay Lal, 'India in the World: Hinduism, the Diaspora, and the Anxiety of Influence'.

But dishonesty cannot always dissimulate successfully: thus the stated intention of the Government of India to confer the privilege of dual citizenship upon the members of the newer, affluent diasporic communities of the north, while leaving Indian communities in the Caribbean, Fiji, South Africa, Malaysia and elsewhere out in the cold, and this on the pretence that the older diasporic communities have not maintained much of a living connection with the motherland, comes as no surprise.

Far from highlighting the injustices to which Indians around the world might be prey, the two Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas gatherings have inadvertently underscored the fact that many diasporic Indian communities have remained largely invisible, and that jubilant celebrations of India's supposed global presence may not be particularly meaningful to Indians residing in countries, such as Trinidad, Guyana, South Africa, Fiji, Kenya, and Malaysia where the racial divide is profound if not always transparent, where Indians, even as they might be dominant economic players, are shut out from civil society, or where the syncretic culture forged through common Hindu and Muslim bonds is now being undermined by what can fairly be described as the communal evangelism of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

How have Indians negotiated their place in countries where they have been settled for a hundred years or more? What relations have they forged with indigenous groups, as in Fiji, or with other, older immigrant groups, such as the African populations of Trinidad and Guyana? Anti-Chinese riots have been a recurrent feature in modern Indonesian history,

and in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States Muslims might be encountering increased harassment and discrimination the world over, but I suspect that Indians have had the singularly unpleasant distinction, in the post-World War II period, of facing eviction from more countries than any other community.

There has been a pervasive feeling in countries such as Kenya, Uganda and South Africa, where Gujaratis came to dominate the trading networks, constituting a comprador elite, that Indians occupy the same place that Jews once did both as middlemen (and, one must add, as scapegoats), but I am not aware that those who have dealt with Indians unjustly, often with brutality and naked aggression, faced anything like the opprobrium that persecutors of Jews have faced in the twentieth century. The inescapable conclusion is that Indians can be oppressed without much consequence to the oppressors, a conclusion borne out, as we shall have occasion to witness, in aftermath of the coup in Fiji in 2000, as well as by the so-called repatriation of Indian Tamils from Sri Lanka following the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964.

While even a sweeping glance at the liabilities faced by Indian communities around the world remains outside the scope of this paper, numerous insights can be gained by delving briefly into the contemporary histories of the five diasporic communities, with histories that diverge as much as they intersect – of South Africa, Trinidad, Fiji, Malaysia, and the United Arab Emirates. How far these are ‘representative’ diasporic communities is an open question. Both Fiji and Trinidad received large number of indentured labourers, largely from the Bhojpuri-speaking Gangetic belt in

North India, who worked the sugar plantations.

However, the Indian presence in Trinidad, which dates to 1845, anticipates Indian migrations to Fiji by four decades; moreover, Trinidad straddles the Atlantic, just as Fiji straddles the Pacific, and if Trinidad’s history is inextricably intertwined with the histories of the Caribbean, including other diasporic Indian communities in Guyana, Surinam and Jamaica, Fiji’s Indian diaspora is today increasingly beginning to circulate in neighbouring New Zealand. But nonetheless Fiji and Trinidad are also iconic in many similar ways of the Indian indentured experience.

The Indians, as George Lamming so movingly wrote, humanized the landscape, tilled the soil, and put the food on the table.⁵ In Trinidad, at least, despite growing up initially under conditions of appalling poverty, Indians were still able to effect a number of remarkable transformations over two or three generations. Through sheer perseverance, labour and thrift, and most significantly by a calculated withdrawal into their culture in which they found forces of sustenance, these Indians successfully laboured to give their children and grandchildren better economic futures. Their very success would be held against them, as palpable evidence of their greed and exploitative nature.

The calypsonian Lord Superior voiced these sentiments in Trinidad, when he urged Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams, on the eve of independence

5. George Lamming, ‘The Indian Presence as a Caribbean Reality’, in *Indenture & Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, ed. Frank Birbalsingh (Toronto: TSAR [Toronto South Asian Review], 1989), pp. 45-54. I have, in this paragraph, drawn upon my earlier work: ‘Reflections on the Indian Diaspora in the Caribbean and Elsewhere’, *New Quest*, no. 117 (May-June 1996), pp. 133-42.

in 1958, to 'tax them' Indians 'mad':
It have some old Indian people
Playing they like to beg
This time they got one million dollars
Tie between their leg
I am telling the Doctor
I am talking the facts
Is to chop loose the capra [cloth]
And haul out your income tax.

Electoral politics in Trinidad, where Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians account in equal measure for nearly 85% of the population of 1.3 million, is seared by an intense racial divide. Three general elections took place in Trinidad in a little more than two years, the most recent in October 2002. The Indian presence in Trinidad's electoral politics was felt for the first time in 1986 when the ruling party, the People's National Movement (PNM), which had reigned supreme since Trinidad derived its independence from British rule in 1962, lost to a coalition of the United National Congress (UNC), led by the trade unionist Basdeo Panday, and the National Alliance for Reconstruction.

The Alliance's A.N.R. Robinson was swept to power, and Basdeo Panday was placed in charge of the Finance Ministry at a critical moment in Trinidad's history when the IMF had called for drastic economic reforms to avert what it described as economic collapse. In 1991, the PNM came back into power, but in 1995 Panday achieved what would have been considered absolutely improbable a decade ago, namely outright electoral triumph. Thus, 150 years after Indians first arrived in Trinidad, an Indo-Trinidadian, whose ancestors came from the plains of north India, ascended to the office of the prime minister.

Having served out his five-year term, Panday appeared to have consolidated the UNC's place in Trinidad's politics when he again led the

party to victory in late 2000. The UNC captured 19 seats, and the PNM 16 seats; but dissension in the ranks of his party, which deprived Panday of his majority in Parliament less than a year after he was sworn into office for his second term, led him to dissolve Parliament and call for early elections. Among those who quit Panday's cabinet was Attorney General Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, who stated that he no longer had confidence in his government's ability and will to deal with corruption.

Manning and his PNM, which has historically attracted Afro-Trinidadians much as UNC derives most of its constituents from the Indian population, campaigned against corruption in the government; on the other hand, Panday argued that his party was best calculated to lead the oil-rich nation into further prosperity and economic growth. The December 2001 elections, however, resulted in a stalemate: the UNC and the PNM, still led by Patrick Manning, each captured 18 seats in the 36-seat Parliament. The three dissenters from Panday's party, though constituting themselves into a new political party called Team Unity, failed to win any seats.

Following the stalemated election, Panday proposed a power-sharing agreement between the two parties, but he could not gain Manning's agreement. Subsequently, Panday and Manning came to the understanding that Arthur Robinson, who had been elevated to the largely ceremonial Presidency of Trinidad & Tobago in 1997, would choose the head of government, and that new elections would be held at a date agreed upon by the two parties. On 24 December 2001, Robinson chose Manning to form the new government. For the Indian community, puzzled that incumbent Prime

Minister Panday should have been overlooked, this was perhaps calculated to revive memories of the domination of Trinidad's politics by those of African descent. Panday declared himself unable to accept Robinson's decision on the grounds that it had not been made in accordance with the provision of the Constitution.

Following a party meeting on 2 January 2002, Panday issued a statement describing the government of Manning as 'illegitimate, unconstitutional, [and] contrary to the rule of law.' Manning, for his part, issued a statement on 3 January laying claim to the government and denouncing Panday for 'disregarding the rule of law' and 'engaging in action designed to inflame the minds of followers.' 'Poor Mr. Panday, I feel sorry for him,' Manning said. 'Some people have difficulty adjusting to new arrangements. He doesn't realize that he's not the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, that there's a new prime minister and he has difficulty adjusting to that. But I think over time, he will adjust, so let us be patient and kind with him.'

Manning had surely spoken too early, since the political stalemate never disappeared, and the country's political business came to a standstill in the absence of a Speaker in the House of Representatives. Manning, consequently, asked for the dissolution of Parliament and asked that the country go to the polls yet again. In the most recent elections, Manning led the PNM to victory with 20 seats. But the overwhelming suspicion that the PNM represents only the Afro-Trinidadian party remains; moreover, electoral politics is scarcely the only sign of the racial cleavage that afflicts Trinidad.

The country's Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha, which closely monitors

the state and its institutions, has time after time pointed to other manifestations of what it describes as the systemic undermining of the Indian population. From official patronage of the Carnival and the state's refusal to grant the Mahasabha a radio license to allegations that school textbooks allow African and Afro-Trinidadian history a disproportionately high place on the syllabus and that the government is keen to introduce 'racial quotas' which would reduce if not terminate the domination of the University of West Indies's St. Augustine campus by Indo-Trinidadians, the signs are unmistakably clear of endeavours to represent Trinidad's history as exclusively a history of the black diaspora.

Considering the Mahasabha's predisposition towards an extreme form of Hindu nationalism, one might be tempted to dismiss its frequent depiction of Indians as the victims of state-sanctioned racial bigotry and discrimination as rhetorical excess. But Trinidad's growing problems with crime perhaps furnish a different window into allegations of racism and discrimination. Reports about the rise of kidnappings in Trinidad have been proliferating over the last two to three years, and even the US State Department which views Trinidad as a valuable oil-producing ally, had perforce to admit in 2003, in its annual report on human rights, that 'criminal kidnappings for ransom were a growing problem' in Trinidad.⁶

The Indian community has alleged that the vast victims are of Indian origin, and though no one has claimed that Trinidad's own government is implicated in these kidnap-

6. There were 227 killings in Trinidad in 2003, or proportionately twice as many as in the US, which itself has a homicide rate that exceeds, by a factor of 50 or more, the rate in countries

pings, there are reasonable questions to be asked how far such kidnappings are tolerated or overlooked by a police force that might be indifferent to the sufferings of Indians. Prime Minister Manning, speaking at Howard University in Washington, DC in December 2003, went so far as to describe 'a significant number' of the 'kidnapping' as bogus, as 'something else', and thus clearly implying that they had been stage-managed, or that such reports were only calculated to lead 'to heightened tensions among the people of Trinidad and Tobago.'⁷

However intense the racial divide in Trinidad, the prospects for Indians in Fiji look far more bleak. One encounters many people who pride themselves on their knowledge of the world to whom it comes as a shock that 20% of the British Caribbean is Indian; much greater is the shock of those who are brought to the awareness that 30 years ago Indians accounted for over 50% of Fiji's population. Indians were first brought to Fiji in 1879 to work as indentured labourers on sugar plantations owned primarily by the Colonial Sugar Refining company of Australia; they not only farmed the land, but it is from the profits of their labour that Queensland and New South Wales were developed. Yet far too many spokespersons, usually self-proclaimed, for the ethnic Fijians and Europeans alike

such as Japan and Switzerland. See also US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2003: Trinidad (Washington, DC: US State Department, 2004), on the internet at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27921.htm>

7. Sean Douglas, '2003 Saw the End of Innocence', in Newsday (4 January 2004), on the internet at: http://www.newsday.co.tt/stories.php?article_id=12324; see also the press release issued by the UNC on 17 December 2003, accessible at: <http://www.unc.uk.net/xoops/modules/news/article.php?storyid=78>

have chosen to obscure the history of Indians in Fiji.

The Indians became the mainstay of the sugar industry, by far the largest contributor to the Fijian economy; and yet, as the Fijian leader Ratu Sukuna conceded in 1936, demands for their exclusion from the political process, indeed from Fiji, were being voiced. As he wrote, 'They have shouldered many burdens that have helped Fiji onward. We have derived much money from them by way of rents. A large proportion of our prosperity is derived from their labour. Yet a Fijian Nationalist Party was formed by a man called Butadroka in January 1974 with the slogan of 'Fiji for the Fijians.'⁸

The Indians still till the soil, but under Fijian law the ownership of 83 percent of the land is reserved for ethnic Fijians, and another 9% comes under the jurisdiction of the government. Indians own less than 2% of the land. Following independence in 1970, 98% of the Indians took out Fijian citizenship, though there is nothing to suggest that they came to acquire the privileges of citizenship. The fact that the term 'Fijian' is somehow reserved for ethnic Fijians, rather than Indian Fijians, is itself indicative of the secondary status of Indians.⁹

Independence did not furnish Indians with rights over land; instead, the Indo-Fijians who had worked the land were granted 30 year leases.

8. Cited by Sarva Daman Singh, 'Indians in Fiji', in *Indians Abroad*, eds. Sarva Daman Singh and Mahavir Singh (Gurgaon, Haryana: Hope India Publications and London: Greenwich Millennium Press, 2003, for Maulana Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata), p. 224.

9. In 1995, Rabuka issued an order stipulating that the term 'Fijian' was to be understood to mean *all* Fijians. Ethnic Fijians resisted, and the Indians still go under the designation of 'Indo-Fijian'.

Upon their expiry in 1997 and the years following, these leases were allowed to lapse by ethnic Fijians who much preferred to let the land remain fallow in the name of nationalism and ethnic pride rather than be turned over to Indians.¹⁰ Indo-Fijians, despite some obvious attempts to starve them into submission and compel them into exile, have nonetheless shown great resilience: thus they also predominate among the traders, smaller businessmen, and educators. They have been a presence in Fiji for several generations.

Yet the leader of the coup of 2000, George Speight, who is of part European descent and was then resident of Australia, and is much more of a foreigner to Fiji than any Indian born and settled there, had the audacity to describe Indians as 'foreigners': as the Austrian wit Karl Krauss might have said of him, he shows the same effrontery that a sausage does when it is charged with being a pig. There is, moreover, little that is 'indigenous' about the political arrangements devised for ethnic Fijians: the Great Council of Chiefs was largely a British invention, an attempt to appease ethnic Fijians alarmed at the prospect of Indian entry into Fiji.

Indians have been streaming out of Fiji since the first coup in May 1987. The political reality is that the National Alliance, dominated by ethnic nationalists, Australian business interests, and a few wealthy Indians, was handed a decisive defeat in the elections of the preceding month, which brought to power a multi-racial coalition: this display of democracy was found to be intolerable. Dr. Timoci

Bavadra, at the head of a coalition of the Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party, had garnered the support of the Indo-Fijian community, and 19 of the 29 elected MPs were Indo-Fijian. Half the cabinet seats were filled by ethnic Fijians, and political power in the new government was admirably balanced between ethnic and Indian Fijians.

Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, leader of the coup and encouraged by the 'Taukei movement', an ethnic Fijian defence of 'our land', claimed to be preserving and enhancing the rights of ethnic Fijians; Indians were seen as attempting to take control of the economy. The view that Indians were assuming political domination was groundless, but Rabuka was adept at exploiting the charge, nor did ethnic Fijian leaders do anything to issue a contradiction. The constitution that was promulgated in 1990 ensured the political supremacy of ethnic Fijians and reserved senior positions, including the post of the prime minister, for that community; it allocated nearly 54 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives to the ethnic Fijians, whose share of the population, following the exodus of Indian Fijians, had risen to 46 per cent.

However, the openly racist constitution turned Fiji into something of a pariah, and Rabuka eventually, in 1997, appointed a constitutional review commission. Racially-based provisions of the constitution were eliminated; not surprisingly, in the elections of 2000, Mahendra Chaudhry swept to power. His Labour party, in alliance with two smaller Fijian parties, captured 70 per cent of the seats. This put an Indo-Fijian at the helm of power for the first time in Fiji's history.

Though George Speight was to defend his actions in launching the

coup of 2000 with the observation that Fijians needed to take control of their own destiny, having allegedly been reduced to impotence in their own country, it is instructive that Chaudhry awarded eleven positions in his cabinet to ethnic Fijians, and only six to Indians. It is said that history repeats itself as farce; in Fiji, one suspects that farce is the very template of history. The same scenario of racism, gangsterism, and xenophobia was played out yet again as a coup overthrew Chaudhry's government.

In the political negotiations that were to take place between Speight, the interim military government, and the Great Chiefs, the Indian Fijians, whose numbers have now been reduced to 42-44% of the population owing to massive migrations to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US, were found deserving of one ministerial seat in the new administration – that too a junior non-Cabinet post for 'multiethnic affairs'. The new – the other word for old, tested, and corrupt – way of conducting 'multiethnic affairs' in Fiji appears to be to proceed on the assumption that the ethnic Fijians are the only true inheritors of the land and that Indo-Fijians, now settled there for five generations, are still visitors. One wonders how long it will be before the discourse shapes the reality, and Indo-Fijians are treated like visitors to their own land.

Indian indentured labour to Malaysia, in contrast to Trinidad, originated in the late 19th century; and the vast bulk of the labourers were drawn from South India, predominantly from Tamil Nadu. As many as 90,000 Indians were brought to Malaysia every year between 1911-1930,¹¹ and in certain districts, for example in southern Kedah, the Indian population became preponderant. Malaysia's Indians today account for

10. Even mainstream American media has reported on the Fijian monopoly over land: see Richard C. Paddock, 'Fighting for a Slice of Heaven', *Los Angeles Times* (29 July 2002), p.A5.

8 per cent of the country's population. Owing to Malaysia's relative proximity to India, it is reasonable to infer both that a greater number of Indian labourers returned at the end of the contractual period, and that even those who stayed behind continued, howsoever sporadically, to retain some links with the motherland. Malaysia's Indian population bears, in these respects, a closer similarity to Indians in Singapore, which in any event was part of the Malay Federation before emerging as a separate nation state.

It has often been said that in Malaysia the numerically preponderant Malays have a grip over government jobs, the Chinese predominate in business, and the Indians are congregated around plantations. Until recently, indeed, rubber plantations were still the largest employers of Indians, and though oil palm is rapidly replacing rubber as Malaysia's largest cash crop, a significant portion of Indian Malaysians still live in and around plantations. The deplorable living conditions in the rubber estates have been well documented.¹² Water and electricity shortages are acute, and houses are in an extraordinarily dilapidated condition; workers are exposed to toxic pesticides, and medical services are grossly inadequate. Salaries of estate or plantation workers are among the lowest in the country, and in the mid-1990s nearly 70 per cent of workers were heavily in debt.¹³ Estate

11. Paul D. Wiebe and S. Mariappan, *Indian Malaysians: The View from the Plantation* (Delhi: Manohar, 1978), p. 6.

12. Much less has been documented about living conditions in oil palm plantations. Conditions in rubber estates are, however, likely to be much worse, since earnings have risen very little in relation to consumer prices. Studies of Indian poverty in Malaysia may be partly misleading in that the research has dwelled on the workers in rubber estates, though oil palm estates are increasingly accounting for a greater share of employment.

schools, with a few exceptions, receive no state funding; nor has the government shown any desire to build schools for the Tamil community in urban areas which have witnessed a growth in Indian population as rubber plantations get shut down and Indonesians and Bangladeshis increasingly take the place of Tamils on estates. Alcoholism and subtle discrimination have together drained the life out of the community.¹⁴

As some studies of Malaysia have suggested, poverty afflicts the Malay community as well. The New Economic Policy of the long-serving but recently retired Prime Minister, Muhammad Mahathir, generated new wealth but also exacerbated some inequities. A report published in 1998 admitted that 'poverty among Malays is still widespread as it is among urban settlers, indigenous peoples, plantation workers (mainly Indian) and New Village residents (mainly Chinese).'¹⁵ Though there is some disagreement about how far Indians have been specifically targeted by the state, no one denies that considerably greater segments of the Indian population remain deeply mired in poverty than among other ethnic groups.

Whereas affirmative action or some equivalent policy of reservations is used in most countries to redress the grievances of minority communities

13. Anon., 'Life in the Estates', *Utusan Konsumer* (Penang, August 1981), p. 12; Jeremy Seabrook, 'Changing Life of the Tamils in Malaysia', *Utusan Konsumer* (Mid-October 1994), p. 12; N.V. Subbarow, 'Estate Workers Living Conditions', memorandum published by the Consumers' Association of Penang (n.d.).

14. See the compilation published by the Consumers' Association of Penang, *Samsu (Intoxicating Liquor): The Silent Killer* (n.d.).

15. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), *Malaysian Human Rights Report* (Selangor, Malaysia: Suara Kommunikasi, 1998), pp. 10-11.

who may have been subjected to systematic discrimination, in Malaysia the policy of reserving jobs for *bhumi-putras*, or 'native sons of the soil', is calculated to privilege the Malays and give them the assurance that state patronage remains the preserve of the native community. But the preservation of Malay hegemony can take on much more subtle forms.

It has, for example, long been the experience of the educated elite among Indian Malaysians that a glass ceiling prevents the ascendancy of Indians to the highest positions not only in government but in universities and other institutions of civic society.¹⁶ Malaysia openly prides itself on its multiculturalism, and yet the country is openly described as an Islamic state. There is no necessary inconsistency in this position, but for the fact, to take only one example, that Malaysians do not in the least take it as amiss that every university has a mosque, but none offers religious services for Hindus, Christians, or practitioners of other faiths.

It is on the note of multiculturalism that we come to the case of South Africa. The migration of Indian farm labourers to South Africa commenced in 1860: following the example of plantation owners in Madagascar and Mauritius, farm owners in the province of Natal successfully lobbied the Indian Government to send indentured labourers to farm the sugar plantations. By 1900, Indians outnumbered whites in the province of Natal. But the history of the Indian diaspora in South Africa has its own distinctive features: as is well-known,

16. This is the view not only of harsh critics of Malay hegemony such as Professor P. Ramasamy of the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, but also of writers such as K.S. Maniam. I met with both of them in Kuala Lumpur in September 2003.

it is here that non-violent resistance to unjust laws was initiated by Gandhi and other members of the Indian community.

Notwithstanding their relative proximity to the east coast of Africa, and to the Indian communities of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zanzibar, South Africa's Indians have perhaps had more in common with the Indians of Fiji, Mauritius, and Trinidad. But South Africa remained distinct for other reasons: it is here that the ideology of racial segregation received full-blown expression. Racism was no longer to be predicated on mere sentiment; on the contrary, racial discrimination was institutionalized. The African National Congress (ANC), the main organ of resistance to apartheid, had at one time been inspired by both the Natal Indian Congress and the Indian National Congress. In the apartheid era, Indians not only fought alongside black people, but came to occupy significant leadership positions in the ANC.

The end of apartheid should have been a signal to Indians that the disabilities under which they had suffered would be removed. As elsewhere around the world, the white race in South Africa had set itself up as a transcendent entity, representing itself as a people whose presence alone kept the country from disintegrating into racial and ethnic hostilities. The racialized hierarchies white South Africa brought into existence have prevailed. Thus, discrimination is no longer sanctioned by state policy, but black animosity has increasingly turned towards Indians. Matters came to the fore in mid-2002, when the Kwa-Zulu writer and musician, Mbongeni Ngema, released a song entitled 'AmaNdiya', the Zulu word for 'Indians'.¹⁷ 'Oh brothers,/Oh, my fellow brothers,' begins the song,

We need strong and brave men
to face the Indians.
This situation is very difficult,
Indians do not want to change
Whites were far better than Indians
Even Mandela has failed to convince
them to change,
Whites were far better than Indians.

Ngema then suggests that politicians, bribed by Indians, remain indifferent to the plight of Zulus. He invokes great figures from the Zulu past – just why he does so becomes clear from these lines:

Indians have conquered Durban.
We are poor because all things have
been taken by Indians.
They are oppressing us.
Mkhize wants to open a business in
West Street,
Indians say there is no place to open a
business.
Our people are busy buying from
Indian shops...
They [the Indians] don't want to sup-
port a single black shop.
Indians keep coming from India.
The airport is full of Indians.

One commentator has written that a similarly incendiary song by the Rwandan musician, Simon Bikindi, was heard on radio in the fatal spring of 1994 shortly before the Hutus went on a genocidal rampage and, in the short space of three months, ended up killing 800,000 Tutsis. Bikindi is now awaiting trial before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda on five counts of genocide.¹⁸ The broadcasting of 'AmaNdiya', some South African Indians have maintained, may have kindled a violent crime wave against Indians. The South

African Human Rights Commissioner described 'AmaNdiya' as a song that 'taints an entire community' and 'perpetuates harmful myths and stereotypes'. It is to the credit of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission that, acting on a complaint from the South African Human Rights Commission, 'AmaNdiya' was taken off the air waves on the grounds that it 'promoted hate in sweeping, emotive language against Indians as a race.' But will such protections always be available to Indians?¹⁹

The position of Indians in the diaspora has always been precarious. The dissolution of a democratically-elected government, as in Fiji, largely for no other reason than that it was headed by an Indian, even in a country where they accounted for over half of the population, points to the fragile position of Indians, and the discriminatory and blatantly racist mechanisms deployed to keep them on the margins of civil society. In some respects, the case of Fiji is distinct though not unique: we generally hear, not surprisingly, of minorities that are subjected to systematic discrimination, but much less frequently of majorities that are treated as minorities. Having said this, I by no means to wish to commit myself to viewing politics as a question of majorities and minorities, since this framework is, in many respects, a modern kind of political arithmetic. Minorities have often had the confidence of majorities, as the case of Parsis in India so palpably demonstrates.

Fiji apart, it is necessary to understand that the problems of Indians in the diaspora, which had been

17. I am grateful to Professor Surendra Bhana of the University of Kansas for sharing with me the translation of the song that appeared in the Johannesburg *Post*. 24-26 May 2002.

18. See <http://www.thisdayonline.com/archive/2002/07/03/20020703art03.html>

of substantive concern to the Indian National Congress even as it waged a freedom struggle against the British, were underscored almost immediately after the attainment of independence by India in 1947 and Burma the year after. Indians had been prominent property owners in Burma, significant in business and trading circles: in Rangoon, they accounted for half of the population of 240,000 in 1900. Hindustani was at least as popular as Burmese. Though directed principally at the British colonizers, the nationalist movement also gave rise to the demand for restrictions upon the immigration of Indians into Burma, and under the Indo-Burmese agreement of 1941, Indian immigrants were required to meet certain financial obligations and literacy qualifications.

Another provision of the agreement forbid Indian men from marrying Burmese women without previous sanction of the Burmese government, and such sanction was to be given only to those immigrant men who could furnish evidence of their capacity to provide maintenance to their intended wives. The Burmese nationalist, Aung Sun, described the 'Indian vested interests' as not in favour of independence; he also thanked Jawaharlal Nehru for his efforts to check the 'rapacity and economic imperialism of Indian big business.'²⁰

The Indian exodus from Burma commenced during World War II, and though many Indians returned immediately after the war to help in the country's reconstruction, Indian businessmen and traders complained that neither their lives nor possessions were safe under the growing political and economic instability created by

the nationalist movement and communist insurgencies. When the Indian community appealed to Nehru for assistance, he took the position that this was a matter between them and the Burmese state, and India was unable to intervene in the internal affairs of a foreign state; moreover, Indians who had been settled overseas were to reconcile themselves to the fact that, having abjured Indian citizenship, they had no substantial claims on India.

As Nehru was to put it in a Lok Sabha debate on 8 March 1948, 'Now these Indians abroad, what are they? Indian citizens? Are they going to be citizens of India or not? If they are not, then our interest in them becomes cultural and humanitarian, not political. That interest of course remains.' Adverting to the Indians in Fiji, Mauritius, Burma, and Ceylon, Nehru put the option starkly: 'Either they get the franchise as nationals of the other country, or treat them as Indians minus the franchise and ask for the most favourable treatment given to an alien.' This has, in effect, been the position of successive Indian governments to this day, though as India acquires more muscle power, or certainly imagines itself (which it does frequently) to be a major player on the world scene, it might be tempted into believing that nothing precludes it from exercising its influence to protect the lives and interests of those who, though they may not be Indian citizens, are Indians in ancestry.

In a number of countries Indians were sacrificed, as we have seen, to nationalist politics. Wherever in Africa Indians established themselves, they became indispensable as the principal arteries of trade, shopkeepers to the nation, and so opened themselves to the charge that they had done so by illicit activities, by marginalizing the local population,

and with no other thought than of enhancing their own interests and prosperity. This interpretation is not without its Indian supporters: thus Ashwin Desai, speaking of the Gujaratis in South Africa, has written that the 'real story of how these people exploited Africans, their contempt for the ordinary coolie and their desire to be accepted by the whites is hidden and forgotten'.²¹

On the occasion of the recent and unprecedented exhibition on the Asian African Heritage at Kenya's famous National Museum, a local Kenyan was heard describing Indians, who are known as Asians, as 'behav[ing] like colonizers'.²² This sentiment is evidently quite widespread, and the conduct of Indians in countries such as Kenya, where a negligible number of Indians held Kenyan citizenship even some months after independence in December 1963, has not been calculated to endear them to Africans.²³

Still, even if one were inclined to accept these judgments, nothing can justify the cruel and brutal treatment meted out to Indians in Uganda, from where Idi Amin effected their wholesale and immediate removal, or the violent uprooting of the community in Kenya following an unsuccessful coup in 1982. Indians have all too often been sacrificed to black nationalist politics, and one ought not to for-

21. Cited by Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Diasporic Dispositions', *Himal* (December 2002).

21. Karl Vick, 'A New View of Kenya's "Asians"', *Washington Post* (15 March 2000), p. A21.

22. See, for example, Mala Kapur Shankardass, 'Is This My Country? To and From Kenya', *India International Centre Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Monsoon 2001), pp. 14-24.

23. Vinay Lal, 'India in the World: Hinduism, the Diaspora, and the Anxiety of Influence', *Australian Religious Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 19-37.

20. Cited by Swapna Bhattacharya (Chakraborti), 'Indians in Myanmar', in *Indians Abroad*, eds. Sarva Daman Singh and Mahavir Singh, pp. 172-204 at p. 195.

get that they, too, were subject to the machinery of racial discrimination and apartheid. The dominant white regime sought to drive a wedge between Indians, coloureds and blacks, and etch within the minds of Indians a notion of ineradicable 'difference' between themselves and other subjugated peoples.

That this strategy was not without success was attested to by the first free elections in South Africa, where Indians, though they had fought alongside the black population in the African National Congress to resist apartheid, deserted Nelson Mandela in the fear that an inevitable 'Africanization' under Mandela was bound to impoverish and marginalize them.

Two fundamental considerations arise, then, in thinking of the future of Indians in the diaspora. First, diasporic Indians cannot reasonably look to the Indian government for succour and assistance, and whatever the strength of the emotional and cultural ties between them and the 'motherland', their centre of being lies elsewhere. That question, 'What can India do for people of Indian ancestry abroad', begs to be effaced.

There are doubtless cases which clearly call for an exception. Where Indians have recently gone as labourers on work permits, as is the case with a significant number of migrants in the Middle East, the Indian government is duty bound to lodge, whenever necessary, protests over their ill-treatment, or to otherwise act to protect their lives and property. In the days subsequent to Kuwait's invasion of Iraq in 1990, and before the beginning of the war between Iraq and the US in 1991, the Indian government took upon itself the mammoth task of evacuating the greater part of the Middle East's Indian population, and it did so at the request of a panic-stricken

people who could claim their Indian citizenship as a passport to safety.

One can admit that the question of what must be the relationship between overseas Indians, whether citizens of India or of another nation, and the Indian government is one that admits of no easy solution. It may be a bitter pill to swallow, but the Indian government is in any case incapable of anything more than a toothless response; and its own inadequacies will, in turn, be reflected in the indifference that stronger powers are likely to display on the question of discrimination against Indians in the diaspora.

Despite much noise made about excluding Fiji from the Commonwealth and other international associations, and India's protestations, Mahendra Chaudhry's government was not restored to power. The reach of Indian power is not so great that India is in the position of being able to retaliate for attacks perpetrated upon its citizens living overseas, or on people of Indian descent. Nor, one might add, should any country have such reach – but that is another matter.

Second, diasporic Indians are, it is my submission, called upon to inhabit a different kind of political awareness. However much comfort there may be in thinking of identity as given, bound within purportedly natural categories, or in supposing that identity can always be recovered and revived, there is a greater courage in reconstituting identity along lines of political and cultural choices. It is for Gujaratis, Bengalis, Tamilians, Punjabis, Malayalis, Sindhis, and others in the diaspora to forge links between themselves as Indians, to enter into coalitions with other marginalized, peripheral and disenfranchised people, and most significantly,

to formulate for themselves a moral, sensitive and democratic politics.

Almost everywhere where Indians and blacks form part of the population, there is the perception that Indians are not merely apprehensive of them, but likely to observe a caste-like discrimination against blacks. One could go so far as to say that Indians have, not infrequently, shut blacks out of their moral vision, and invested them with an evil that properly belongs to political and social structures.

In an illuminating incident that took place in 1994 in Diamond Bar, an hour's drive from Los Angeles, the Indian community honoured in a public reception the Los Angeles Police Department for its supposedly heroic efforts in capturing four black men who had been implicated in the rape of a young Indian girl. Though it was a matter of evident relief and unfailingly conducive to justice that the criminals were apprehended, the Indian community appears to have overlooked the widely-known fact that the Los Angeles Police Department had then – only a short while after the videotaped public beating of Rodney King had become a matter of worldwide discussion – a notorious reputation for blatant racism, and that there was scarcely any need to commend the department for the mere execution of its duties.

Such insensitivity cannot bring the Indian community closer to other minorities who have all too frequently been the victims of racism and police brutality. If this appears to be an unusual incident, we have only to recall the general disdain in which black families in the US (and elsewhere) are held by Indians. The comparatively high rates of teenage pregnancy, single motherhood, drug abuse, incomplete schooling, and incarceration

among young blacks are seen as exemplifying the failure of black adults to exercise responsibility and provide for their families; on the other hand, the devotion to family life is trumpeted as a quintessentially Indian trait.

The retreat into the family home, the concerted refusal to engage with a wider notion of the 'public', the general segregation from other communities, and the often mindless replication of 'timeless' Indian traditions have been among the more distressing characteristics of Indian existence abroad, particularly in the affluent West. We cannot but fail to recognize, when we keep vividly before our mind the story of Indian indentured labour, that in the marginalization and pauperization of blacks and Hispanics there is also, however unwilling most Indians in the US may be to recognize it as such, their own humiliation. Or, to take another example, if Indians are all too often heard describing black people as 'lazy', they might be reminded that, for 200 years, the British were wont to use the same language for them.

I return, finally, to my provisional distinction between the 'old' and the 'new' Indian diasporas, between the diasporas marked, respectively, by 'labour' and 'longing'. The prospects for Indians in the newer diaspora, some would argue, have never looked so good. Ujjal Dosanjh, who grazed cattle in the Punjab and grew up in the tiny hamlet of Dosanjh Kalan, not leaving India until the age of 17, served a term recently as Premier of British Columbia. This is only one of many remarkable stories of upward mobility among Indians in the diaspora.

For most people in India, however, the real 'success' story of diasporic Indians appears to be, as I have mentioned previously, the acquisition

of immense wealth by Indians in Silicon Valley. Newspapers serving the community, such as *India West* and *India Post* (both in California), enthrall their readers with frequent accounts of Indians who have entered the ranks of billionaires. Though the dot.com bubble burst, the enthusiasm of Indians for the miracles wrought by information technologies has by no means diminished. The predominance of Indians in the software industry remains a matter of great pride, and numerous list-servers recount Indian successes in lavish detail. It is sometimes pointed out that Indian achievements on Wall Street, in the computer industries, and in the professions (especially medicine, the sciences, and engineering) have now yielded political dividends.

The Indian diasporas closest to the 'homeland' have received comparatively little attention in the scholarly literature. The presence of a substantial Hindu community in Bangladesh, which over the years has had to reconcile itself to the fact that the partition is an enduring reality and that there is no prospective return to the homeland, ought to raise pressing questions for students of the Indian diaspora. Though reports of the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh have been circulating widely over the last few years, their plight, insofar as anyone has cared to give it compelling attention,²⁵ is viewed within the history of Hindu-Muslim relations in the Indian subcontinent, rather than as part of the story of the diaspora under duress.

When Pakistan and India nearly entered into a full-scale war over the occupation of Himalayan peaks in Kargil, the Americans urged Pakistan to retreat to their side of the Line of Control, and the then Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaaz Sharif, had to return to Pakistan from a visit to Washington empty-handed. This episode is in conversations pointed to as the first truly significant achievement of the Indian lobby in Washington, and many think that the Indian caucus on Capitol Hill is poised to make India into a vital economic and political partner of the United States. Notwithstanding these supposed triumphs, the anxiety of diasporic Indians in the United States that India has not yet arrived, even that India is barely treated with respect, has not diminished but increased. That, however, is a story which I have told elsewhere.²⁴

If diasporic Indians even in the US feel that India has not quite yet received its place under the sun, we might consider the misfortune of those who have long lived in the shadows.

Similarly, the histories of the Sri Lankan (or Jaffna) Tamils and Indian (or plantation) Tamils have not adequately been integrated into narratives of the Indian diaspora, and even less so into accounts of disabilities suffered by Indians in the diaspora. As a scholarly study published in 1984 details, the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964, rendered necessary by chauvinist Sinhalese sentiment which deprived Indian Tamils of their citizenship following the attainment of independence by Ceylon in 1947, provided for the 'repatriation' of nearly two thirds of these Tamils back to India. In other words, the Indian gov-

24. Even allowing for the 'fact' (as has been represented to me) that the New York-based Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Unity Council ascribes to Hindutva ideology, and is prone to paint Islam in the broad brushstrokes of evil, it seems that their recent and massive compilation, *Bangladesh: A Portrait of Covert Genocide* (2003), furnishes incontrovertible evidence of large-scale atrocities against Hindus.

25. Yvonne Fries and Thomas Bibin, *The Undesirables* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1984).

ernment, quite unable – and perhaps unwilling – to do anything else, consented to this gross form of injustice. The only comparable exodus, that of the Vietnamese following the ignominious withdrawal of the US from Saigon in 1975, received massive publicity. Yet the forcible repatriation of half a million Tamils over two decades has barely entered into the annals of human rights' violations.²⁶

In speaking of Indian diasporic populations closer to the 'homeland', I also refer to Indians in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf states. Though as late as around 1970 there were only 40,000 Indians in the Middle East, their numbers grew rapidly in the 1980s, and after 1979 there has never been a single year when fewer than 113,000 Indians left to work in the Middle East. From 1992–1997, more than 400,000 Indians left for the Middle East every year. Judging by the statistics maintained by the Indian government's Ministry of Labour, in 2000 there were three million or more Indians in the Middle East.²⁷

Owing to the highly prohibitive naturalization laws prevailing in West Asia, most Indians, even those settled there for well over a decade or two, have been unable to get naturalized; and those who have gained citizenship have found, as in Bahrain, that naturalized citizenship is still a substantially lower class of citizenship, with restrictions, among others, on the right to vote and to run for office. There has also been a constant stream of reports about Indian women working as housemaids who, though subjected to sexual harassment and

rape, have no protection under the laws; similarly, there has been a stunning silence on a problem unique to diasporic Indians in the Gulf, namely the inability of non-Muslims to carry out cremations, as in Saudi Arabia, or having only the most elementary facilities to do so, as elsewhere in the Gulf.

junction between those who lead working-class lives and those who shuttle back and forth between metropolitan capitals. That the contemporary Hindi film is increasingly attentive to the diaspora is worthy of note, and flattering to diasporic Indians, but have we asked why its conception of the diaspora is confined to the modern West?

It has sometimes been argued, following Myron Weiner's argument, that even scholars have paid so little attention to Indians in the Gulf because they constitute what he has described as an 'incipient diaspora'. Though Weiner concedes that Indians constitute a large group of foreign workers, he suggests that those who are 'allowed to remain in their host country only to work' may not constitute a full-blown diaspora, and consequently live in 'a state of legal and political ambiguity, economic insecurity and as social outsiders'.²⁸ But such a view elides considerations of class, and fails to recognize that a modern diaspora comprised overwhelmingly of the lower strata is not only viewed by Indian elites as something of an embarrassment, as the very sign of India's secondary place in geopolitics and the world economy, but as posing immense difficulties for those who are inclined to view the 'old' and the 'new' diasporas as largely exclusive categories. That scholars have chosen to remain silent about this diasporic population is in itself a sign of the discomfort that the 'old' diaspora is still likely to induce among those who prefer to see the diaspora as an emancipatory and hybrid space for transnational flows of goods, ideas, and people.

In the Indian diaspora, as in India itself, there is then an increasing dis-

junction between those who lead working-class lives and those who shuttle back and forth between metropolitan capitals. That the contemporary Hindi film is increasingly attentive to the diaspora is worthy of note, and flattering to diasporic Indians, but have we asked why its conception of the diaspora is confined to the modern West?

With what consequences does the Indian diaspora get reduced in the modern Hindi film to mainly the US, and why should diasporic Indians in the US, who have done little to develop their relations with other minorities in the country, just as they are often inclined to support religious extremism in India, be courted by the Hindi film industry or be seen as models of success? The modern Indian diaspora began in conditions of extreme adversity, and we are not likely to be sensitive to the acute adversity under which Indians still labour in many countries where they have a significant presence if we allow ourselves into thinking that the narratives of Silicon Valley 'miracles' and the musings and rantings of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie have adequately captured the spaces which diaspora inhabits.

To be in the diaspora means to be in an in-between space, and it is in this space that Indians must endeavour to give society a new, at least slightly more human, face. As I have written elsewhere, the diaspora has also nurtured soft forms of Hinduism, new forms of Chutney music, and even, from within the depths of *Ramacaritmanas* country in Fiji, the first novel ever written in Bhojpuri anywhere in the world.²⁹ Our Indian diaspora, in this respect, is much like India itself, complex and variegated, and one hopes that it will before long have the Purana that it deserves.

26. Anisur Rahman, *Indian Labour Migration to the Gulf* (New Delhi: Rajat, 2001).

27. Myron Weiner, 'Labour Migrations as Incipient Diasporas', in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, ed. Gabriel Sheffer (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 47.

28. Vinay Lal, 'Diaspora Purana', *The International Indian* 10, no. 6 (February 2003), pp. 29–31.

Dusra Hindustan

VIJAY PRASHAD

FOR the past two years, a horde of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) has flocked to New Delhi for the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. Individuals from 60 different countries come as *de facto* representatives of the 22 million *desis* who live in them. The bulk of the 'delegates' come from the advanced industrial states. Those who organized the celebration had no democratic imperative to ensure the accurate representation of the diaspora: they concentrate on the most wealthy among the diaspora for reasons of their own.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is hosted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FICCI) Diaspora Division. FICCI has begun to cultivate the NRIs to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow to US \$5 billion by 2008. The FICCI Diaspora Division has already begun to 'work in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs in particular and the Government of India in general to forge a constructive and productive relationship

with the Indian diaspora.' The division is eager to use the NRI network to export Indian goods, to garner charitable contributions for social development and to draw upon the special skills among the NRIs to the benefit of India's commercial and industrial ventures. Given this, the division is quite forthright that its work is 'specifically [to] focus on strengthening the commercial and economic dimensions of India's relations with the diaspora,' to 'leverage the diaspora's strengths for India's economic growth and development, just like China's bamboo network.' What else should one expect from FICCI? It certainly can't have a cultural policy.

What is important here is that the diaspora is being imagined now not so much as unfortunates who have to be championed (as in the 19th century), as the brain drain (in the 1960s and 1970s), or as cultural ambassadors (as in the 1980s). We now have the diaspora represented almost entirely by the very wealthy who reside mainly in the advanced industrial states and

whose image is summoned by the term NRI. By 'NRI' we certainly don't mean the taxi drivers in New York City, the sugarcane workers in Guyana or the domestic servants in the Gulf. 'NRI' now means the Hinduja clan, Sanjay Kumar and Kanwal Rekhi.

This short essay will offer a vision of the two different kinds of political Indians who populate the diaspora – those of the Red variety, who pioneered militancy and the call for *Purna Swaraj* in the old days, and those of the Green and Saffron variety, who are active in the promotion of neoliberalism and cruel cultural nationalism. While the latter are the embodiment of the NRI, the former, the Reds, are relegated to the margins of the diaspora.

If the history of the Indian diaspora is remembered only as the history of the NRI, the economically affluent migrant, then the lives of the working-class and of the revolutionary Indians is obscured. The first major wave of modern migration took place from 1834, when working-class migrants from eastern and southern India signed indenture contracts to go to South-East Asia and the Caribbean, and later to Africa. Five million Indians travelled across the dark waters until the indenture programme ended in 1916. 'I no go no way again, I have to wuk. I have to slave Trinidad,' sang Moolian of his travails in indentured life. People like Moolian toiled in unfamiliar lands in work regimes that demanded enormous physical and spiritual sacrifice, and yet, they persisted. Many formed organizations to defend their cultural inheritance and later, trade unions to demand their rights as workers and people. Consider this: not only did the Indian diaspora birth the first revolutionary modern *desi* organization, but it was the Indian diaspora that made Gandhi

Indian as well as taught him the arts of mass resistance.

In 1913, long before the formation of the Communist and Socialist movement within India, a group of radical Punjabi migrants in Stockton, California, formed the Ghadar Party. They met in a gurdwara that not only gave them spiritual solace, but also gave them a space for community and political gatherings. Here they formed a party of rebellion and began activities to both overthrow the British Empire and to improve the lot of the migrants on the West Coast of America. In their goals set out at their August 1913 meeting, the founders called upon the organization 'to liberate India with the force of arms from British servitude and to establish a free and independent India with equal rights for all,' and it noted, 'Every member was duty bound to participate in the liberation struggle of the country in which they were resident.'

In one of their many poems/songs that spread their message, the Ghadar Party railed against the quietism of the Indian National Congress. *Kade mangyan millan azadiyan na Hunde tarliyan naal na raj loko Karo na minnat ainwe bano na kaiyar Fardo talwar ihan nahin rahnna Agge veero arjiyan ne ki banna liya Zalam firangiyan ne desh kha liya.* (Freedom will not come through supplication.

Political power will not come by appeal.

Don't offer cowardly petitions.

Lift up the sword, they will not remain. What have your petitions wrought? Brutal foreigners have plundered our homeland.)

The Ghadar Party developed a cadre of dedicated freedom fighters, many of who returned to India in *jathas* to seed a nationwide rebellion against the British Raj. They had no

desire for 'home rule' or for 'dyarchy': they wanted Purna Swaraj long before Gandhi moved the Congress to adopt that resolution on 31 December 1929. In the Party's newspaper, *Ghadar*, Hardayal wrote, 'Tribe after tribe are ready to mutiny. Your voice has reached China, Japan, Manila, Sumatra, Fiji, Java, Singapore, Egypt, Paris, South Africa, South America, East Africa and Panama' (14 July 1914). The energy of Ghadar swept the Indian diaspora and it produced a generation of radicals within India, such as Bhagat Singh, who moved the Freedom Movement from cooperation to non-cooperation (one of the Ghadar Party's famous early slogans was, 'Complete Independence or Non-Cooperation').

As the peasants and intellectuals of California created an organized form for the struggle, in South Africa the miners and sugarcane workers met a lawyer who learnt the arts of mass non-violent resistance from them. M.K. Gandhi had already begun a struggle alongside the Natal Indian Congress against a poll tax, but in mid-October 1913, he felt the earth move under his feet. Against the poor work conditions, the poll tax and the legislative denial of non-Christian marriages, several thousand Indian miners put down their tools. Led by such organizations as the Johannesburg Tamil Benefit Society, the miners of Newcastle put forward demands, but had no dignified response from the government of Jan Smuts.

Gandhi and the miners tried to force a confrontation when four thousand of them marched illegally into the neighbouring state of Transvaal. Smuts did not arrest them, and hoped that economic necessity would drive the strikers back into the mines. When all seemed lost, not only did workers across Natal go on strike, but they

were joined by sugar mill workers, domestic servants, and workers in the produce markets of the main cities. When the recently subdued Zulu peoples began to make overtures to join the movement, Smuts released Gandhi from jail and negotiated a deal. Gandhi, then, not only learnt the power of *mass* movements, but he also understood the value of a deal. Gandhi returned to India to lead the movement against the British Raj, and he became our hero, whereas the unknown miners, Gandhi's teachers, are largely forgotten.

In his inaugural address to the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas on 9 January 2004, Prime Minister Vajpayee did mention the history of the indentured migration. He urged the delegates 'not to forget the pain and sufferings that early Pravasi Bharatiyas had to go through. The injustice meted out to them remains a dark chapter in India's history. At the same time, their determined struggle against adversity is a source of inspiration for all of us.' The prime minister, however, disregards the current forms of indenture that mark the diaspora, the harsh treatment meted out to the cyber-coolies and the indentured domestic servants and manual workers whose stories infrequently make it to the mainstream press. 'If our forefathers were the victims of want and exploitation,' he says, 'our children and grandchildren will be the trailblazers of prosperity and a new era in human development marked by justice and universal brotherhood.'

The children and grandchildren of the earlier migrants and the new working-class migrants to the advanced industrial states show us that while formal indenture is not on the cards, the harsh immigration rules and the low-wage work within the US, for instance, makes life almost unbear-

able. Bodies stuffed into cargo holds to evade immigration patrols are met with employers who hide workers in hovels. Bodies needed for labour are disregarded for their lives. It is the unacknowledged struggles of these bodies that will bring us to justice, not the wishful rhetoric of the current Indian government and its allies in Washington, DC.

Even as the contemporary Indian diaspora in the US is generally seen as a bastion of the NRI, it contains an immensely diverse population. While there are some Indian Americans who flourish economically, there are too many who do not. A full quarter of Indian Americans live in households with incomes below \$25,000 – even though Indian Americans reported the highest median household income (\$49,696). This means that the rate of inequality in our community here is very high, with a few millionaires and a considerable number who live in the basement of US society. You can't go into an urban hospital in the US without being treated by either an Indian doctor or an Indian nurse. Yet, a fifth of Indian Americans have no health insurance, a higher percentage than the national average.¹

The class interests of these migrants is well served by a few militant desis who are so active on the ground and yet invisible to the media and within India. Organizations like the New York Taxi Workers' Association (that led the monumental 1998

1. One reason for our immense success is the canniness of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service that only allowed highly educated Indians into the country. Of those who migrated into the US between 1965 and 1977, 83% held advanced degrees. They created the groundwork for the Indian American success stories. But, equally, that of the Indians who migrated to the US between 1987 and 1990, a fifth had no high school education, a tenth remain unemployed and a fifth live in poverty.

strike of 24,000 taxi drivers, more than half of them South Asian) and Workers' Awaaz in New York City, are joined by unionists like Zahid Ali Syed, who is the desi representative of the Immigrant Workers' Freedom Ride, a nationwide effort to change immigration laws to benefit workers. After 9/11, with the crackdown on Muslims, many of whom are desis, some young desis moved their inspirational organization, DRUM – Desis Rising Up and Moving – to demand that the government release the names of those who have been detained.

On the terrain of cultural change, women's organizations (such as Sakhi and Narika), gay and lesbian organizations (such as Trikone and the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association), youth organizations (such as Youth Solidarity Summer and South Asian Awareness Network) and others, are vigilant in both the fight against racism and the fight for a just desi culture, not one that looks to an antediluvian heritage for succour.

Finally, desis in the US have also produced strong organizations and individuals dedicated to planetary solidarity. The anti-war and the social justice movements are peopled by plenty of desis, just as organizations like FOIL provide a network to go out and serve the struggle. Or take the case of Radhika Sainath. Here's a young woman from Orange County, California, who decided to join the International Solidarity Movement to defend Palestinian rights over Israeli aggression. She went to Israel, stood side by side with Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and then sat in an Israeli jail because the government targeted her as undesirable. 'What does the Israeli government have to fear from nonviolent civil disobedience against the Occupation,' Sainath asks, 'that it would spend so much time, money



and energy on the abduction and arrest of a 25 year old female US nonviolent human rights activist?

Red Indians have a proud history in the diaspora – it is what motivates us to continue in our struggle for global social justice from within the belly of the beast.

After India won its independence, Prime Minister Nehru looked out over the diaspora and pledged India's support to those who might face oppression overseas. Ten years later, he said that the Indians overseas 'should always give primary consideration to the interests of the people of those countries; they should never allow themselves to be placed in a position of exploiting the people of those countries, cooperate with them and help them, while maintaining their own dignity and self-respect.' Even as the Indian government cherished those who claimed India as their 'homeland', Nehru recognized that they had to make their lives where they lay their heads.

Such was the policy of the Indian government until the 1970s. In that decade, the economic dislocations of the Indian economy, the Congress' abandonment of economic nationalism and the growth of cruel cultural nationalism in its place, led to a reassessment of the role of the diaspora. In 1976, the Emergency government announced, 'steps to encourage investment by non-resident Indians.' The newly minted NRI had a new responsibility: no longer was this highly skilled sector to be denigrated as a brain drain, but it was now to be encouraged as a 'cash cow' to help the Indian state increase its foreign exchange reserves.

In 1982, Manmohan Singh of the Indian Planning Commission said, 'Indian communities abroad are noted for their hard work, initiative, and

enterprise. As a result, they have accumulated large resources of investible funds.' The Indian government needed this money to cover its newly expanded military and technical imports. But the NRIs failed the government: in the crucial period of liberalization from 1991 to 1994, only eight per cent of foreign direct investment into India came from the NRIs, and after this initial burst of enthusiasm the numbers have decreased. The NRI, nevertheless, is now part of the economic plans of the liberalized state, as is evident at the FICCI Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.

When the BJP government came to power in 1998, the NRI had a special place in its heart. Significant sections of the NRI population backed the BJP's attempt to turn Ayodhya into Jerusalem. In 1970, some proponents of Hindutva created the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) in New York City. The VHPA wanted to start a *sanghatan* movement, to gather together the Hindus in America. In the early years it had little success mainly because the first migrants to take advantage of the open door for professionals after 1965 had little interest in such matters. These professionals did set up numerous Indian cultural organizations, but they had more interest in fellowship than in the cruelty of Hindutva.

The VHPA brought together all the social anxieties of the migrants and put themselves forward as the solution. It urged desis to live epic lives that serve as a mode of social control against the second generation desis and women. They cultivated the removal of desis from US social and political life in order to get greater access to the funds of the NRIs for their own activities. Rather than ask for desis to join their non-desi neighbours to change the structures in the

US that oppressed them, they asked them to go inward, to channel their political and social energy into the liberation of a 'homeland' that they felt guilty for having abandoned.

This ostrich-like attitude toward the US and the demand that the NRI give money for the VHP-RSS type activity is what we call Yankee Hindutva. In August 1998, the VHPA participated in New York City's annual India Day Parade for the very first time, perhaps to celebrate the arrival of the BJP to governance in Delhi. Indeed, after the May 1998 nuclear tests, Indian-American newspapers bore advertisements that congratulated the BJP government for its audacity. The radioactive policies of the 'homeland' allowed certain fragments of Yankee Hindutva to feel emboldened to act in public.

If a fraction of the billions of dollars held by NRIs came into India as investments, this would allow the BJP one more *swadeshi* fig leaf over the ravages of capitalist globalization. In 1999, therefore, the BJP pushed the People of Indian Origin card, for those who could gain special economic privileges in India for a fee (about \$300). Most analysts believe that the high fees encouraged only five thousand people to secure these cards. Four years later, the BJP-led cabinet and then the Parliament allowed NRIs from strategic parts of the world to hold dual citizenship: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, parts of the European Union, New Zealand, Australia, Israel, and Singapore. The children and grandchildren of the indentured labourers are given lip-service by the prime minister, but no access to dual citizenship: Trinidadians, Guyanese and South African Indians do not have the kind of capital that the BJP government wants to see enter the Indian economy.

The total income of the NRIs in the US, Canada, and the EU is in excess of \$160 billion, almost half of India's GDP. But, as Praful Bidwai wrote after the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, 'Many wealthy NRIs probably have few loyalties to India.' He cites the example of Lakshmi Mittal, the wealthiest NRI and so-called King of Steel, who said of his investments, 'I am happy there is an NRI policy. But the government should not look at \$50 billion from NRIs. It should look at \$500 billion from MNCs. I do not think any NRI would invest in a major way because of emotional attachment. They want returns, they want results. I love my country. That is fine. But I must get returns as well.' For good reason the NRI is reviled.

The BJP-led government and the opportunistic NRIs must not be allowed to offer their caricature of migration without contest. In these other lands, this *Dusra Hindustan*, there is a diversity that defies the NRI stereotype, and there is a history of anti-imperialist struggle that is far from Hindutva's cruel cultural nationalism that wants nothing more than to suck-up to Empire. The dot.comrades who live in the heritage of the Red Indians are a far cry from the dot.cons who cherish the Green and the Saffron above all else.

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Firm opinions, infirm facts

DEVESH KAPUR

A MUCH repeated argument about the Indian diaspora (particularly in western countries) is that it is a supporter of Hindutva and is implicated in fuelling the rise of the RSS and anti-Muslim violence. A reading of this material appears to suggest that the Indian diaspora settled abroad has developed what in another context has been termed as a ‘pathological identity’ – ‘a pervasive hostility projected onto other ethnic groups.’¹ Writing in this magazine nearly two decades ago, Romila Thapar cautioned against the diaspora’s unhealthy yearning for Hindu nationalism.² Less than a decade later, Shashi Tharoor warned that ‘Expatriates are no longer an organic part of the culture, but severed digits that, in their yearning for the hand, can only twist themselves into a clenched fist.’³

The violence in Gujarat led to an array of charges that diasporic philanthropy has been financing the groups responsible for the violence. Martha Nussbaum for instance has argued that, ‘Highly significant in the funding of the Gujarat violence were private donations organized through the Amer-

ican VHP and various charities that it has organized.’⁴ The most simple-minded of these arguments would run as follows: the Indian diaspora is largely pro-Hindutva which leads it to finance the Sangh Parivar in India and these resources in turn have empowered the Sangh Parivar and allowed it to engage in heinous acts of violence directed principally against Muslims but also at other minorities as well. But what is the analytical and empirical support for these arguments?

There are several claims embedded in these charges here. The first concerns the political mind-set or beliefs of the diaspora. More than a few individuals in the diaspora certainly strongly support the Sangh Parivar. But to draw generalized conclusions about a population based on a visible sample needs strong analytical and empirical foundations, not just assertions.

The second concerns the degree to which these beliefs are translated into actions. If actions speak louder than words, what is the evidence of the actions of the diaspora? Presumably a diaspora engages in a range of actions directed towards the country of origin from business to lobbying to financing civil society and political actors. Just how significant is the financing of the Sangh Parivar part of the portfolio of actions the Indian diaspora

1. Alexander Broth and Donald Rothschild, ‘Pathological Dimensions of Domestic and International Ethnicity,’ *Political Science Quarterly* 110(1), 1995, p. 15.

2. Romila Thapar, ‘Syndicated Moksha’, *Seminar* 313, September 1985.

3. Shashi Tharoor, ‘Growing Up Extreme: On the Peculiarly Vicious Fanatism of [Indian] Expatriates’, *Washington Post*, 15 July 1993, p. C5.

4. Martha C. Nussbaum, ‘Genocide in Gujarat: The International Community Looks Away’, *Dissent*, Fall 2003.

engages towards the country of origin? And finally, how significant are the causal or contributory effects of these actions on violence in India? Has external funding been marginal, considerable, or significant basis of financial resources for the Sangh Parivar because on this rests the counterfactual: does ethnic violence take place in India due to, or despite, the diaspora? More generally, how dominant is the role of overseas Hindus in diaspora-supported violence in India?

In general, is the Indian diaspora in western countries (which is of relatively recent vintage) really any different from the pool from which it is drawn (namely relatively higher educated Indians), ranging from dedicated young men and women working with progressive NGOs to those who harbour rabid anti-minority sentiments to those preoccupied with striking business deals in the booming IT sector? Periodically Indian politicians and political commentators seek recourse to the ‘foreign hand’ argument to explain either their own or the country’s failings. While there are certainly cases of the ‘foreign hand’ being active in Indian politics over the decades, it has served more often than not as a convenient bogey as well. Is this true in this case as well?

The Indian diaspora’s identities range from the cosmopolitan and anti-nationalist to those who espouse a virulent ethnic nationalism. The presumption that the latter is dominant (at least amongst the diaspora living in western countries), is puzzling. Academic writings on the issue, many by the diaspora itself, have a strong anti-Hindutva stance, which itself lays open to question the supposed dominance of Hindutva in the diaspora. But how would one analyze a diaspora’s political disposition towards the country of origin?

The fact that diasporas are prone to long-distance nationalism is now well established and indeed nationalism as a modern phenomenon of imagined communities is one that often grew in the minds of diasporic elites. The creation of Italy did not create Italians – and when they migrated in large numbers to the Americas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries they did so as Sicilians, Neapolitans and the like. But it was in the Americas that the narrower identities fused to form a nascent ‘Italian’ identity.⁵ The act of migration and living abroad affects identities, attenuating some and amplifying others – but which ones and why?

Confining the analysis to the Indian diaspora in the United States and the UK, what characteristics of the diaspora are likely to impact on their politics? A broad set of factors that shapes a diaspora’s views stems from who leaves – so called ‘selection bias’. First, what are the regions and states of origin of the diaspora? If the migration has been much greater from North India than from Southern India, or from Gujarat than from Bengal, it might result in greater anti-Muslim sentiment given the relative degrees of polarization in the different regions of India. For instance, Ashutosh Varshney has argued that ‘Gujarati Americans have been among the most, and South Indians among the least, anti-Muslim in their predispositions.’⁶

Of course non-resident Gujaratis (NRGs) do not necessarily buy this line, with some of them arguing that they ‘know the essence of Hinduism which has a broader perspective. In India, Hinduism seems to be mired

in the slush of bigotry.’⁷ Gujaratis indeed dominate Bengalis in the diaspora, but the large flows in the 1990s to the US of Indian IT workers (the so-called ‘knowledge diaspora’) has a significant (if not dominant) South Indian component, especially from Andhra Pradesh.

However, the effect of the state of origin is qualified by a second factor: how migrants (even from these regions) select themselves. Are the more cosmopolitan ones more likely to leave (e.g. those inclined to cultural studies) or those drenching in Hindutva (e.g. members of the Bajrang Dal)? Three other factors come into play as well – the caste, education and gender profile of the diaspora. It has been argued that international migrants from lower caste groups and women are less likely to support hard-line groups. If so, since both of these groups are relatively underrepresented, the diaspora could be more prone to ethno-nationalism. The case has also been made that the dominance of science and technology in the educational profiles of Indian migrants (especially to the US), makes them more susceptible to the pro-Hindutva ideology due to their lack of exposure to the humanities and social sciences. But whether this is the case, or indeed it is the post-modern narratives that create a more fertile ground for Hindutva, is another story.⁸

In contrast to the effects stemming from the selection bias on who leaves India, the diaspora’s own characteristics as well as ‘host country’ effects, further shape the political views of the diaspora. First, a diaspora’s sense of identity and result-

5. Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2000.

6. <http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/apr/23inter.htm>

7. ‘Proud Hindu, Not a Proud Indian’, *Times of India*, 10 April 2004.

8. Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism*. Rutgers University Press, 2003.

ing political views stems from a cohort effect, i.e. the period in which the diaspora left India. Thus migrants from India to the United States who came in the 1970s did so at a time of economic stasis and political turmoil in India. They might tend to put the blame on the Congress party and to that extent could be stronger supporters of an ideology that is anti-Congress and by default (if not by design) may be more pro-BJP.

In contrast, those who came in the 1990s left India at a time when there was greater self-confidence (at least amongst groups that form the potential pool of international migrants from India) but the country had also turned more right. How would this affect their political views? If a sense of insecurity and anxiety were the wellspring of prejudice, the earlier cohort would be more pro-Hindutva since the more recent arrivals come from a country where levels of self-confidence are higher than in the 1970s. On the other hand, if a diaspora's political views are 'locked in' at the time it leaves the country, the opposite might be true.

Second, political views could reflect an age-effect. A diaspora that is younger is likely to be much more engaged in economic activities whereas retirees are supposedly searching for meaning beyond the empty six bedroom home in New Jersey after their children have flown the coop. If the adage of 'an empty mind is the devil's workshop' is correct, the latter might find some meaning to their lives in supporting hard-line groups. Third, views could also reflect a generation effect. The second (and later) generations are more likely to be influenced by the values of the countries in which they grew up and harbour the resentments of their parents to a lesser degree. For them India is an experi-

ence of relatives and gatherings, food and family rituals, and visits to temples. While it may be felt intensely, it is unlikely to be political in any significant sense because this generation is not just well educated and well off, but has also not encountered racism.

Finally, the diaspora's views are also likely to be shaped if they have come via a third country. The East African Gujaratis in the UK and the US are a case in point. Speculations apart, we simply do not have a firm sense if there are systematic differences between those who came to the US or UK via East Africa (or the Middle East) versus those who have come directly.

It is one thing to have beliefs about something; it is quite another to act upon them. Furthermore, the actions themselves can be variegated. Long-distance nationalism can take many forms, be it lobbying in the country of residence, raising funds for philanthropy in the country of origin or to support extremist groups. Generalizable claims regarding which activities dominate have little empirical basis. With regard to the last, the many claims notwithstanding, the only well documented evidence has focused on three organizations: one in the US, (the India Development and Relief Fund – IDRF) and two that are UK-based (Hindu Sewa Sangh – HSS – and Sewa International).⁹ Of the \$18 billion that flowed into India in 2003 as remittances, the combined flows

from these organizations would be less than 0.05 per cent.

The other sources of official data are also not supportive. The only source of reliable data on foreign inflows to NGOs in India is that maintained by the home ministry under the statutory Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA). An analysis of this data also does not provide support for diaspora flows to Hindu religious groups, but again that could be due to the coverage and classification of the data. This data excludes contributions by NRIs, but includes data from naturalized citizens and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO). However, it is impossible from this data to desegregate that fraction of FCRA funds originating from the diaspora, from that emanating from other sources – namely international NGOs and non-diaspora foreign citizens.

The data maintained by the home ministry on its website gives a breakdown of the FCRA organizations by purpose, classifying them into five principal purposes (*i*) Cultural, (*ii*) Economic (*iii*) Education, (*iv*) Religious, (*v*) Social. Slightly more than one quarter of FCRA organizations have a religious purpose. There is a further breakdown by religious denomination. The majority of FCRA organizations that have 'religion' as one of their purposes are Christian (84%), while Hindu and Muslim organizations are roughly similar in number (six and five per cent respectively).

The stark difference between the number of Christian and Hindu organizations – virtually in inverse proportion to their share in the population – is puzzling and may be due to three factors. Hindu organizations either raise their money domestically and very little from the diaspora. Alternatively, they get their money from the diaspora through informal

9. See 'The Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRF and the American Funding of Hindutva' at <http://stopfundinghate.org/sacw/> and from Awaaz: South Asia Watch (2004), 'In Bad Faith? British Charity & Hindu Extremism', available at <http://www.awaazsaw.org/ibf/ibflores.pdf> as well as the report of the International Initiative for Gujarat (IIJ) at <http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/ijg/>

channels and since NRI flows are not covered by FCRA requirements they are largely undocumented. Or alternatively, organizations that are ostensibly 'social' and 'cultural' might be more sectarian while those that impart education might be much less so even though they might be religiously motivated. Again, we simply do not have the basis to draw firm conclusions.

On the sending-country side, I have surveyed more than 100 Indian-American diaspora organizations. They reveal a range of activities and engagement with India – but religion (and especially support for Hindu organizations) is marginal, if at all. Is it because it is indeed low or because those who support extremist organizations are unlikely to give information on the same? I want to emphasize that all of this *does not* necessarily mean that the Indian diaspora is not a significant financier of the Sangh parivar – it could be, but we simply do not have the evidence to hang it on.

Indeed, the most damning evidence against the diaspora could be about not what it has done with regard to financing groups with an anti-minority agenda, but what it has *not* – namely, lend its voice in being much more critical of the (in)actions of the Indian state with regard to ethnic violence. Its conundrum (in not appearing anti-national) is easier to understand, but the resulting moral ambiguity is not easy to defend. But here again, if one examines the letters to the mainstream media in the US, there were numerous strong critics from members of the diaspora and diasporic organizations.

Finally, how important is the role of the Indian diaspora in ethnic violence in India? The diaspora's role is important but paradoxically (and unappetizing) as it may appear, not as much in the principal focus, namely its

support for hard line Hindu organizations. There have been many excellent analyses of Hindu-Muslim violence be it a decline of social capital, electoral competition or the (in)actions of state organs.¹⁰ Given the socio-economic bases of the Sangh parivar in India, its access to domestic resources – both economic and political power – is expansive. It is *weaker groups* who (for whatever reason) want to challenge the Indian state, that rely to a relatively greater extent on support from diasporas. While this argument depends on what constitutes 'Indian', in so far as violence in India from overseas groups with origins within India's territorial boundaries is concerned, the ethno-nationalism of overseas Hindus is just one.

An array of diaspora groups has – and continues to be – involved in a range of insurgencies in India. In the North-East the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) have operated from Bhutan (until the government of that country mounted a major military operation in late 2003). The All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), operate out of Bangladesh, the Naga leadership has been based in Thailand, and sundry groups have long operated out of Myanmar. Sikh groups in the 1980s, overseas Kashmiri groups and even Indian Muslims overseas have all been involved to varying degrees.¹¹

The critical difference of course between overseas Hindus who are

10. See for instance, Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Yale University Press, 2002; Steven Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004.

party to violence and many other groups is that the former is not directed against the Indian state, while the latter is. The reason is obvious. State oppression and egregious miscarriages of justice in India are not directed against the majority community. (The majority community also suffers from the infirmities of the Indian state but that is out of indifference and venality rather than active organized violence). The 1984 anti-Sikh and 2002 anti-Muslim riots are the most blatant examples of state connivance in organized violence, forcing the communities to seek recourse from overseas. But once violence becomes a spiral, the direction of causality becomes blurred.

Does the diaspora cause or react to events in India? Does increasing communalism and violence in India make the diaspora more prone to directly or indirectly instigate violence in India? Are Hindus or ethnic minorities more militant in India or outside the country? While in all of these questions we can make informed guesses, in the absence of stronger empirical foundations, they will remain just that.

There can be no doubt that intolerance and zealotry today pose a singular challenge to Indian society, its many pluralisms and indeed its future. India's many diasporas are likely to play an important role in influencing this trajectory – for better and worse. However, facile condemnation with little empirical moorings does little to help us understand this complex phenomenon.

11. According to news reports, in the wake of the communal pogrom in Gujarat, Lashkar-e-Taiba stepped up recruitment among Indian expatriates in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia who appear to have been 'central to a welter of terrorist attacks that took place in India through 2003.' Praveen Swami, 'Lethal Remittance', *Frontline* 21(01), 3-16 January 2004.

Lunch with a bigot

AMITAVA KUMAR

Mr. Barotia was talking to someone when he opened the door. Speaking into the phone that he held in his left hand, he gave me his right fist, which I couldn't quite decide whether to touch or to hold. Mr. Barotia said to the person on the phone, '*Haan, haan*, we will sit down and talk about it.'

The apartment, with the sunlight falling on the bulky white furniture, some of it covered with transparent plastic, appeared clean and bright, especially after the darkness of the corridor outside with its musty carpeting. I was happy that I had gotten so far. I had spoken to Mr. Barotia for the first time only during the previous week. On the phone he had called me a *haraami*, which means bastard in Hindi, and, after clarifying that he didn't mean this abuse only for me as a person but for everyone else who was like me, he had also called me a *kutta*, a dog.

Although I had no idea of Jagdish Barotia's identity till recently, I had wanted to meet him for well over two years. I wanted to meet face to face a

man who thought I was his enemy, to see if I could understand why he hated me so much, and why he hated other people who were different from him. My name had appeared on a hit-list put on a website in the year 2000. The website belongs to a group called Hindu Unity – none of whose members, including Mr. Barotia, were named on the site – and it presented links to other right-wing Hindu groups. My name was on a list of individuals who were regarded as enemies of a Hindu India. There was special anger for people like me, who were Hindus but, in the minds of the list's organizers, traitors to Hindutva, the ideology of a resurgent, anti-left, ultranationalistic Hindu cause.

The summer after the site was established, *The New York Times* carried a report on the alliance that Hindu Unity had formed with Rabbi Meir Kahane's group. This is how the article began: 'A website run by militant Hindus in Queens and Long Island was recently shut down by its service provider because of complaints that it advocated hatred and violence toward Muslims. But a few days later, the site

*Excerpt from the author's forthcoming work, *Husband of a Fanatic* (Penguin India, 2004).

was back on the internet. The unlikely rescuers were some radical Jews in Brooklyn who are under investigation for possible ties to anti-Arab terrorist organizations in Israel.' The Zionist organization as well as the Hindutva group had come together in New York City against what they considered their common enemy, Islam.

The news story had mentioned that Hindu Unity was a secretive group. It had been difficult for the reporter to meet the men who ran the website. I had sent several e-mail messages to the address provided on the site – the address where one was supposed to write and report the names of the enemies of the Hindus – but no one had responded to my requests for an interview. Then, while I was having lunch at an Indian restaurant with a leader of the Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Mr. Barotia's name came up. The BJP is the right-wing Hindu party in power in Delhi; the Overseas Friends is an umbrella organization of Hindu groups outside India, zealously presenting to anyone who cares to listen the details of what they regard as the menace of the minorities (that is, non-Hindus) in India. When I told the man that I'd like to meet Mr. Barotia, he gave me his phone number and just as casually, mentioned that Mr. Barotia had been instrumental in establishing the website for Hindu Unity. (When I asked Mr. Barotia directly about this, he said, via an e-mail message: 'I am a supporter of Hindu Unity and all the organizations which support the Hindu cause... I think there is a difference between being a member and a supporter. I do not pay any subscription for membership in Hindu Unity'.)

Half an hour later, I was on the phone with Mr. Barotia. When I gave him my name, he recognized it, and his voice lost its warmth. He told me that

he had read an article of mine describing a visit to Pakistan, and he asked me to confirm what he knew about me, that I had married a Muslim. When I replied that I had, he said, 'You have caused me a lot of pain. I didn't know what to say. It was then, after I told him I wanted to meet him, that he called me a bastard and a dog. He also said that people like me were not secular, we were actually confused. We would learn our lesson, he said, when the Muslim population increased in India, and the Muslims came after us and chopped our legs off.'

I guess I could say that I felt his pain when he said that he didn't understand what had happened to the Hindu children, how it had come to be that they were surrounded by so much darkness. I said to him that I was not a child any more, but I sounded like one when I said that. Mr. Barotia invited me to his home, saying that he was sure that after he had talked to me and given me 'all the facts', I would change my mind about Muslims. He was the secretary of an outfit which he called the Indian-American Intellectuals Forum; he was also the organizing secretary of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the overseas wing of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or National Voluntary Organization), a militant group to which the murderer of Mahatma Gandhi had once belonged. The internet was a gift to Mr. Barotia's propaganda. It made him a better long-distance nationalist. He said to me, 'If the Hindus will be saved, it will be because of the internet. I send out an email and am able to talk at once to 5,000 Hindus.' And so it was that less than a week later, I went to Elmhurst, Queens, to meet Mr. Barotia.

In the summer of 1999, when India and Pakistan were engaged in a conflict near Kargil, in Kashmir, I had gotten

married. In the days leading up to my wedding, I often told myself that my marriage was unusually symbolic: I was doing my bit to help bring peace to more than a billion people living in the subcontinent because I am an Indian Hindu and the woman I was about to marry, Mona, is a Pakistani Muslim.

The wedding took place in June, and it was hot when I drove up to Toronto, where Mona's parents had recently moved from Karachi. Driving home alone (Mona had stayed behind with her family for a few days because they were returning to Pakistan), past Niagara Falls, where I had heard that honeymooners often go, I felt good about myself for marrying 'the enemy'. The thought gave me a small thrill. I began to compose in my mind a brief newspaper editorial about how my marriage had opened a new track for people-to-people diplomacy.

Every day in Toronto the news bulletins brought to us the war in Kashmir. But we had other preoccupations. Along with Mona's brothers and father, I would wake up at five in the morning to watch India and Pakistan fighting it out on the cricket fields in England, where the World Cup tournament was being played. A day before our wedding, India beat Pakistan in the match in Manchester. During that match, one lone spectator had held a sign, 'Cricket for Peace'. Watching the match on television, I wondered whether I too could walk around with a placard hung from my neck, saying 'Marriage for Peace'.

The article I eventually wrote for an Indian newspaper was what first brought me to Mr. Barotia's attention. We became enemies.

At least, that is how he thinks of his relationship to me. We hardly know each other. The issue is not personal; it is political. After reading my articles about my marriage, and later,

my visit to Pakistan, Mr. Barotia denounced me as an enemy of India. I went to meet him in his apartment in Queens because I wanted a dialogue with him. I also wanted to see his face. I found the idea of a faceless enemy unbearable. That wasn't a psychological problem so much as a writer's problem. I wanted detail and voice. Mr. Barotia had said to me on the phone that the Hindu rioters in Gujarat, who burnt, raped, or slaughtered more than a thousand Muslims earlier that year had taught the Indian minorities a lesson they would never forget. I wanted to meet Mr. Barotia so that I could ask him about the process through which he had come to think of the Muslim as the enemy. I did ask him, but his response revealed little to me that was new.

Nevertheless, our meeting was a discovery because it made me think not simply of our differences but also our similarities. What is it that divides the writer from the rioter? The answer is not very clear or simple. There could be more in common between the two than either might imagine – a vast hinterland of cultural memory and shared prejudice, for example. Was it an excess of sympathy on my part – or, on the contrary, too little of it – that made it difficult, if not also impossible, for me to draw a plainly legible line between a man in a mob and myself?

There was a woman in the house, she was Mr. Barotia's niece, and she called out to him when she saw me enter the living room. He was being asked to put on a shirt. Mr. Barotia was short and had a round face with grey eyebrows. He put on a pair of gold-rimmed glasses after I told him that I doubted his statement that we had met before. Mr. Barotia touched his glasses and frowned. He said, 'But your face looks familiar.' I suddenly thought of the Hindu Unity website, where my photo-

tograph had appeared, picked up from the newspaper pieces. Perhaps that was the reason why Mr. Barotia thought that he had seen me before. He had seen my face on the site's so-called black list, along with my name and address. But I couldn't bring myself to tell him that. Instead, I drank the tea that I was offered. And then, Mr. Barotia began to tell me about what he called 'the poison of Islam'.

The litany of complaints was familiar and quickly wearying. Mr. Barotia began with the names of all the male Indian film-stars who were Muslim and married to Hindu women. 'Sharmila Tagore is now Ayesha Begum and that pimp Shahrukh Khan is married to a Hindu girl. Her name is Gauri.' These women had been forced to convert, he said, and now Muslims were having sex with them, thereby defiling them. When Mr. Barotia told me this, he moved his right forearm back and forth against his paunch in a pumping action. He was using a vulgar Hindi word for what he was describing, a word common on the streets in India, and he said it so loudly, and so repeatedly, that I was startled and immediately thought of his niece in the kitchen. I was a stranger and she had not come in front of me; it was Mr. Barotia who had to get up and go to her to fetch the tray with tea and biscuits for us. Her manner had suggested that there was a great deal of traditional reserve in the household. What did she think of Mr. Barotia carrying on so obscenely about circumcised cocks and f***ing?

The BJP leader in the Indian restaurant, when he had given me Mr. Barotia's phone number, had told me that Mr. Barotia's family had been massacred during the riots in 1947, during the partition of India and Pakistan. I found out now that wasn't true. Mr. Barotia said that his family had left

Sindh, in Pakistan, and crossed the border quite safely more than a year after the partition. This revelation left me without a convenient explanation for his bigotry. When I asked Mr. Barotia to tell me about how he had come to acquire his well-defined worldview, he sputtered with rage. 'I was liberal like you, liberal like stupid, ignorant. In Islam, there is no space for your secularism. There is no humanity in it. They extol the virtue of violence, they want to kill infidels... Islam is not a religion, it is a political ideology to capture land and rape women.'

I had begun taking notes. Mr. Barotia would now and then point at my notebook and say, 'Write!' and then he would say things like 'Hindus were being killed in Pakistan and Gandhi was giving speeches. *Saala tum ghoomta hai haraami...* When Gandhi was killed, that day I felt relaxed.' A little later, a friend of Mr. Barotia's joined us, a fat, bearded man with a red tilak on his forehead. This man pedantically recited Sanskrit shlokas – verses from the *Vedas* – when he made his polemical points, and I sometimes turned back to Mr. Barotia's plainer speech, and his abuses, with a sense of relief.

Soon, it became clear that Mr. Barotia was going to buy me lunch. We walked to an Indian diner about a ten minutes away, in Jackson Heights. Mr. Barotia behaved like a friendly host, urging me to try the different dishes, putting bits of warm *nan* on my plate. He also ate with gusto, refilling his plate several times, and as I looked at him, his shirt front flecked with the food he had dropped there, I saw him as a contented, slightly tired old man who was perhaps getting ready to take an afternoon nap. Earlier, Mr. Barotia had told me that because the Hindus had killed so many Muslims earlier

that year in Gujarat, a change had come about. 'We have created fear,' he boasted. *'Yeh garmijo hai, main India mein phaila doonga.* This heat that is there, I will spread it in India. And those who write against us, their fingers will be cut.' But, for now, he was quietly stuffing *pakoras* into his mouth: a retired immigrant worker eating in a cheap immigrant restaurant.

Mr. Barotia had told me earlier that day that he had come to the United States in 1972. For twenty-five years he had worked as a legal secretary in Manhattan – the BJP man in the restaurant the previous week had told me that Mr. Barotia had been 'a typist', and I had seen from the gesture of his hand that he was being dismissive. Mr. Barotia said that he had gotten along well with his colleagues at work and they treated him as 'a partner in the firm', and one of them had even called him after the attacks of September 11 to say, 'Jagdish, we thought you were obsessed with Muslims. But you were right.'

After our lunch, one other matter of business remained. Mr. Barotia was going to give me newspaper-cuttings and booklets. We walked back to his apartment through the crowded streets of Jackson Heights. The exercise brought Mr. Barotia back to life. His home is in a locality where Indians and Pakistanis immigrants live together; Elmhurst is said to be the most diverse zip-code area in the whole of United States. When I asked Mr. Barotia about his experience of living in this part of the city, he looked at the Muslims milling around us, the men with beards and caps, women with head-scarves, and he spat out abuse. They harass our women, he said, and there is a lot of tension here. Then, suddenly, he began to talk of my wife whom he has never met. We were passing in front of the Indian grocery and jewel-

lery stores, and Mr. Barotia turned to me and said, 'It is okay. You f*** her. And you tell everyone that she is Muslim, and that you keep f***ing her! And through her, you keep f***ing Islam!'

'What did you do when he said that?' This is what Mona, my wife, asked me when she heard the story. I had called her from a public phone near Mr. Barotia's apartment. Above me was a large sign with black letters painted on a white board, LEARN ENGLISH APRENDA INGLES. There was a pause before I replied to the question. I told Mona that I had done nothing. Wordlessly, I had kept walking beside Mr. Barotia. It would have been more accurate to say that I had made a mental note of what he had said. I said to myself that I needed to write down his words in my notebook as soon as I was back on the train. And that is what I did. Sitting in the train, with three men on the seat opposite me, each one of them wearing identical yellow jerseys and holding aluminium crutches against their knees, I took down notes about what Mr. Barotia had said during our walk back from the lunch. The strange thing is, although perhaps it is not strange at all, that later Mr. Barotia's words crossed my mind, just when my wife and I had finished having breakfast in our kitchen and there, next to the sink with the empty bowl of cereals, I had begun to kiss her.

During lunch, Mr. Barotia had told me that I was ungrateful if I forgot how Hindu warriors had saved our motherland. He must have gotten to me because when he asked me why I believed in coexistence with Muslims, I said a phrase in Hindi that essentially meant 'We are Nehru's bastards'. It was an admission of guilt, of illegitimacy, as if Nehru, the socialist first prime minister of India, had done

something wrong in being a liberal, and those of us who believed in his vision of an inclusive India were his ill-begotten offspring. Nehru is often accused by his detractors of having been a profligate person, and my remark had granted him a certain promiscuity. But the more serious charge hidden in my comment was that the former prime minister had produced a polity that was the result of miscegenation with the West.

I was being disingenuous – and so was Mr. Barotia. Our lives and our histories, with or without Nehru, were tied up with links with the wider world. I am an Indian writer who writes in English. Mr. Barotia's parent party, the RSS, had been inspired by the Nazis and revered a German man, Hitler. Today, Mr. Barotia is a fan of the internet. We both live and work in the United States. We are both struggling, each in our way, to be like Nehru, whose eclecticism was exceptional. But Nehru was also exemplary because, unlike many of his Hindu compatriots, he had an unwavering belief that Hindu-Muslim conflict had nothing to do with tradition but was a modern phenomenon, which could be corrected by means of enlightened policy.

In the train, flipping over some of the papers that Mr. Barotia had given me, I began to read what the Hindutva brigade had to say about Nehru. An article provided 'circumstantial evidence' that Nehru was a Muslim. One item of proof offered was the following: 'He had "Muslim" morals while "chasing and pursuing" a married woman (Edwina Mountbatten) and professing love to her. If he were a Hindu he would have respected married women and looked at the unmarried girls as "devis" (goddesses).' Another piece, this one about Gandhi who had preached love among

different religions, began by asserting that there are two kinds of bastards: those who are 'born of illicit sex' and those who are 'despicable in word and conduct'. 'The remarkable thing about Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi,' the writer said, 'is that he was a bastard on both counts.'

Mr. Barotia had given me a set of typewritten sheets collected under the title 'Wake Up! America! Wake Up!' These pages, each one carrying exhortations printed in emphatic bold letters and followed by a series of mercilessly underlined sentences, were his response to the tragedy of September 11. ('The macabre massacre of around 15,000 people (mostly Disbelievers) in less than 120 minutes. The inciter, the instigator QURAN is the CRIMINAL CULPRIT, which incites millions of Muslims around the World to the ghastly, ghostly crimes of this enormous destructive nature on the Disbelievers; and UNASHAMEDLY at the same time, tells these are all HOLY! So, Oh Disbeliever World! UNDERSTAND THIS COLD, CHILLING TRUTH.')

As I read the following words, it was as if I could hear Mr. Barotia's hectoring voice. His interest in alliteration had not been evident to me before, but it didn't distract me from his real interest in producing a phony history and linking it to language. 'As the history of Mohammed goes, he was a serial rapist, a serial murderer, a chronic criminal, a treacherous terrorist who was banished by his family and the society of his times,' Mr. Barotia wrote. He followed a little later with a bogus disquisition on the etymology of the name for Muslims. The Prophet, in order to avenge the lack of respect shown him, founded 'gangs of powerful youth (Muscle Men), offering them girls of their choice, food and wine.' And,

'the illiterate Mohammed mispronounced the word "Muscle Man" as "Musalman".' Over a period of time, this mispronunciation became an accepted pronunciation!' The ten-page text ended with a question not about September 11 but an earlier unresolved crime that is still an obsession for many conspiracy-theorists in America and to which Mr. Barotia was only giving a new twist: 'Who was behind the planning, plotting and planting the Death of the Dearest JFK?' The answer: 'It was ISLAM, ISLAM and ISLAM, the ever valiant villain.'

There are various things that could be said about Mr. Barotia. One would be that he is a fringe element that gives a dangerous edge to an increasingly powerful and mainstream ideology in the subcontinent. His political affiliation is with the party that rules now in New Delhi, although it is in retreat in parts of India. Mr. Barotia is also a member of the group that claims success in raising funds in the West – including investments made by expatriate Indians, allegedly to the tune of four billion dollars – to support the Indian government after economic sanctions had been imposed on India following the nuclear tests in 1998.

But, what interests me, as a writer, are the words that Mr. Barotia uses. Their violence and ferocity – their absoluteness compromised and made vulnerable in different ways, not least by the repeated eruption of a sexual anxiety – carry the threat most visible in the rhetoric of rioters in India today. That rhetoric leaves no place for the middle-class gentility of Nehruvian liberalism. Indeed, its incivility is a response to the failures of the idealism represented by the likes of Nehru and Gandhi. Mr. Barotia's voice is the voice of the lumpen that knows it is lumpen no longer. It almost

has the legitimacy of being the voice of the people, which it is not, and its aggressiveness is born through its own sense that it is pitched in battle against those who held power for too long.

I am not sure whether I would ever, or for long, envy Mr. Barotia's passion, but I find myself sympathetic to his perception that the English-speaking elite of India has not granted the likes of him a proper place under the Indian flag. Once that thought enters my head, I am uneasily conscious of the ways in which I found myself mocking Mr. Barotia's bigotry by noticing his ungrammatical English. Like Mr. Barotia, I was born in the provinces and grew up in small towns. For me, the move to the city meant that I learnt English and embraced secular, universal rationality and liberalism. Mr. Barotia remained truer to his roots and retained his religion as well as a narrower form of nationalism that went with it. His revenge on the city was that he also became a fanatic. I do not envy him his changes, but I can't think of those changes without a small degree of tenderness.

There is also another reason why Mr. Barotia's words hold my attention. His stories about heroism and betrayal share something with the fantasy-world of my own childhood, whose half-understood atmosphere of rumour and prejudice was a part not of a private universe but a largely public one. What Mr. Barotia and I share in some deep way is the language of memory – that well from which we have drawn, like water, our collective stories. After my meeting with Mr. Barotia, I thought of a particular incident from my childhood and wondered whether he, too, had similar memories, linking him and me, all of us, to all the bigots of the world.

My memory concerned a dead lizard. I must have been five or six at

that time. The lizards, the *girgit*, were everywhere. In the small garden outside our home in Patna, they would creep out of the hedge and sun themselves on the metal gate. (Many years later, in a mall near Washington, I saw the lizards being sold as pets, and was reminded of my childhood fear of them.) These lizards were yellow or brown, their thin bodies scaly, and many of them had bloated red sacs under their chins. Although I was scared of the lizards, I also wanted to kill them. I often daydreamed about killing one by throwing a stone at it when it wasn't looking. I would try to imagine what its pale exposed belly would look like when it fell through the air, from the gate to the ground.

A boy who was a year ahead of me in school actually killed one of them, bringing it to me a plastic bag. It was he who told me that the lizards were Muslim. He pointed out the sacs under their chins and said that they used to be beards. Here is the story he told:

During the riots that accompanied the partition of India in 1947, the Muslims were running scared of the Hindus. If the Hindus found the Muslims, they would murder them. If the Hindus did not kill the Muslims first, the Muslims would instead butcher the Hindus with their swords. Or they would take the Hindus to the new country, Pakistan, where the Hindus would be converted and become trapped forever. One day, the Hindus saw a bearded Muslim running away. They caught him and were about to chop off his head. The man was a coward. In order to save his life, he pointed with his beard toward the well where the other Muslims were hiding. Because of this act of treachery, that man was turned into a lizard with a sac under his chin. That is why when we Hindus looked at these lizards, they bob their heads as if they are pointing toward a well.

Whose identity is it anyway?

SHEKHAR DESHPANDE

THE forever-affable *The New York Times* on 26 March 2004 ran a story on its culture pages about multicultural life on Coney Island Avenue. It is a collection of rapid observations on cultural harmony among diverse groups of immigrants in the city. One gets the image that this place is a veritable feast of food, languages and music, all blended in a wonderful image of contemporary urban America. The story entitled, 'On Brooklyn's Avenue of Babel, Cultures Entwine', is fully mindful of the times in which it is enunciated as it summarizes the issues about immigrant life and America: '...here civilizations that clash elsewhere share not just blocks but grocery stores.'

This is how one of the leading newspapers in this country sees diaspora. It is a vision of harmony among themselves and a romantic image of American public life. In this mainstream vision of multiculturalism, diasporic communities are an attractive feature of a society where diverse cultures live side by side, each in their enclaves, but fully assimilated in public life. That is, cultural clash is dis-

solved when we think of food, music and other 'non-political' features of multicultural life.

Americans like to embrace diversity with a certain historical distinction. After all, this is a country of immigrants, and as such it offers a colourful mix of different races and peoples from around the world. In fact, one of the most common metaphors used for this vision is that of a melting pot, where everyone blends in perfectly into a mixed coloured but distinctive mix of diverse peoples.

Those who believe that multiculturalism, as it is lived, is more like a salad, a mosaic, a quilt, where each identity can be seen distinctly without blending into each other, contest this vision. Proponents have claimed that this multiculturalism makes this country distinctive. But if its claims on a society founded on the principles of Enlightenment are to be true, it must respect this diversity and face the real life issues about equality and respect while maintaining diversity. No doubt, this has been a contentious debate and in many ways, as we will see, it figures into the intellectual debates among Indians as well.

It is possible to see Indians in this country as aligned with their host land, as harmonious contributors of food and music in a generally attractive ('Orientalist!') vision of the society. Else, they could be seen as one of the major components of an egalitarian society. Some of us may like to take stock of forty some years in a picture of 'progress' and 'achievements': steady immigration, a gradual growth of 'little India's' everywhere from California to New Jersey, an increasing presence in public and cultural life of this country, and a visibility led by everyone from the physicians and cab drivers to television talking heads, journalists, scientists and engineers. If you look

inside the community and see this dominant vision of accomplishment, and progress for the community, there is no doubt a great deal of truth in these claims. Empirically, as this society has grown, Indians have grown too and that growth has not been minor by any assessment.

The image of the Indian community situated on a road to perfect harmony defined by the mainstream may equally be seen in a different light. The temptations of measuring any historical phenomenon in terms of progress are attractive but they do not grasp the complexity of uneven development and even more importantly, they miss the elements of contradiction, a rich and veritable presence of forces that shape diasporic identity. The New York Times sees compatibility in terms of food, music and other forces of innocence. But what escapes them entirely is the underside of culture where this harmony is played out into a struggle between reality and representation.

To understand Indian American identity, one may find in Walter Benjamin a concept sharp and potent enough to approach the complexity of these issues. Alarmed by the claims of progress and narratives of history which record only victories, Benjamin proposed a different method. The march of history, he thought, has no regard to the mechanisms of exclusion or violence of contradictions. His idea of a dialectical image, therefore, is an instrument that can reveal the relationship of Indian community in the United States at this historical juncture. As a given moment frozen in front of you, its time and elements nakedly inviting one's introspection, a dialectical image is very much a juxtaposition of elements positioned to bring out the contradictions, the hidden hits and misses, silences and pronouncements.

Without regard to a catalogue of progress or claims of unyielding march, a dialectical image generates provocative thought because it plays up the contradictions ignored by the narratives of progress. It is an exercise in reflection, and makes us realize that the Indian community in the United States appears to conform to neither The New York Times' vision of melodic cultural clash nor the cacophony of claims of diversity simply because one finds a solace of independence in these claims.

In recent times, both here and in their homeland, Indians in America have come to be known as part of the NRI community around the world (non-resident immigrants). Within their own community, this notion prevails over all the others. It is very difficult to leave the country behind even though you have left it in a palpable sense. The internal character of this community is inescapably Indian. Whether we witness this in their grocery stores, the large traffic in Bollywood film rentals, growing number of temples around the country or their rising prominence with the sheer weight in numbers, Indians are a group protecting their identity as Indians. If we listen to the steady but vigorous dialogue within its confines, best embodied in the views of young writers and publications within the community, these concerns are about being an Indian. It is about maintaining one's own culture, traditions and values, starting from family values and celebrating all things Indian.

Since the immigration of Indians has grown steadily since the early waves in the 1960s, there are now problems on generational levels. Here, the conflicts are embedded more in the tension between the imperatives of the culture in which the younger generation is growing and those that their par-

ents and elders think are simply corrupt and not genuinely respectful as those they had brought with them. The second and third generational issues are of main concern to the internal mechanics of how the Indian community functions and how it treads the waters of an aggressively and rapidly changing culture in the US. While these problems are not uniquely Indian by any means, they are brewing here with greater intensity and do surface as a major issue of representation in cultural gatherings, writings and even films and television shows.

Part of the drive to define ourselves as genuinely and strongly Indian is influenced by the urge to establish ourselves as non-resident Indians. There is, among Indians, an unyielding urge to belong to India. This raises all sorts of puzzling and endless questions at a practical and intellectual level. Clearly, this irrepressible desire for dual citizenship speaks for maintaining dualism in diasporic life. Part of it is motivated by a desire to draw financial benefits from a dual relationship and, given this, there are few who could benefit measurably from this new status. But we need to remember that the desire to acquire dual identity is also driven by an illusory aspect of diasporic identity everywhere, the desire of belonging to the land that one has left behind.

The status of an exile is never an easy one. But one that is aware of its own state of being is especially difficult. Those who want to belong to India want to belong to the mythical India of their memory, their own sense of what it was and has been. This from a group of people, specifically the earlier generation in large part, who adapt to new structures of feeling here but don't want to lose their anchor in rapidly imaginary waters. But the impulse is strong. It is maintained,

nurtured and even cultivated by this internal and internalized culture of preserving their own India.

It is always a fascinating issue how we hang on to imaginary identities and what means we use to do so. Since the frame of reference they want to keep alive is changing, Indians have wonderfully resorted to a larger mythical achievement of their memory and public life back home, the omnipresent and prodigious presence of movies in their lives. Bollywood films, available now from major neighbourhood stores, their own grocery stores (which are an important part in holding on to this identity process in general), and a variety of mail order outfits accessible from all parts of the country, have to be one of the most mysterious vehicles of culture and memory ever imagined.

Since the idyllic life we believe we have left behind is not accessible through other means, it is kept alive by Bollywood cinema. The weddings, the romance, the family politics, the religious rituals, the ever cacophonous chorus of (the so called uniformly) Indian values coming from blockbusters preserve an India that is not easy to reproduce by any other means. It is a powerful medium, and unlike in countries like Trinidad where the separation from the homeland is more clear and contact with it is scarce, it is not the only medium. Never mind that Bollywood cinema itself is a gigantic production of a homogenous myth called India, a machine successful at projecting a dominant vision of India. More importantly, it has become a prominent mechanism of cultivating and preserving a sense of Indianness among Indians.

If we visit this notion of what it means to be an Indian, we realize that an entire set of discourses are under-

way to maintain it as a theoretical possibility while it remains a practical difficulty in the lives of Indians. In large communities, where there are sizeable numbers of variety of Indians, where Bengalis and Punjabis, Maharashtrians and Tamils coexist, the idea of an Indian identity tends to be quite mixed. Here the divine claim to the separate identity of one's real place in India takes precedence over the larger pressure to be called Indian. One is a Bengali before one is an Indian. In smaller communities where the numbers don't force you to retreat into your specificity, there are no imperatives to claim any particulars. But this perpetual pull toward the specificity is a fundamental part of lived identity for many Indians. It results in the formation of small enclaves based on regional and linguistic identities. Finally, it decides what needs to be preserved and what needs to be delineated. Several of the regional groups have the equivalent of the 'Sunday' schools in their temples, where old folktales, religious texts and rituals are kept alive for second and (now) third generation of Indians.

If we think of how problems of any culture find their place in the public map of representations, it becomes clear that those who have the means to do so and those who have the language to do so succeed. There is this old tale among linguists. When learned and upper class kids are caught in a mischief, they weasel their way out of it because their sophistication of language allows them the privilege, while uneducated and lower class kids, in the same situation, face the consequences because the skills of representation are not at their disposal. The literate, the articulate and those who can afford the leisure of intellectual pursuits dominate the discourse of identity. It is legitimate to

ask: whose identity is it anyway – those who can articulate it or those who suffer it?

The rise of an underclass among immigrant Indians has grown sizeably over the past two decades. But their concerns, struggles and issues have not reached the register of the conscience in the media or the public life of Indians. Often survival in economic crossfire or simple issues of immigration and health insurance are sufficient to take your mind off dual citizenship, mythical reconstruction of India in Bollywood films, or various manifestations of what it means to be part of a diaspora. There are the perennial cab drivers in the city, graduate students who work for pitiful wages called assistantships, waiters in Indian restaurants who are denied even the minimum wage and the gratuities assumed to be part of living wages, untold number of household help in Indian and other homes – all face accumulated problems of nitty-gritty survival in an economy that brings them hope and often just hope. Identity for them is so far removed from theoretical and conceptual considerations, but the very thought of it exposes the larger forces that weigh in on the lives of individuals. Diasporic identity becomes a luxury for those who have the language, the conceptual structures and the intellectual leisure of contemplation.

The US economy is increasingly driven by demands made on the low level workers. It is not simply a glorious service economy, where there is more information processing than manufacturing, but an economy that requires labour which must go unnoticed to the larger concerns of politicians or numbers on Wall Street. It is no wonder that the President of the US recently asked for a legislation that would grant legal status to a large

number of illegal Mexican immigrants. True, it is a cruel cynical ploy in an election year, but it speaks volumes for the necessity of this labour in the economy. A sizable part of the Indian community is made of this level of workers whose identity must be articulated by those who have the means to do so.

All our vaunted claims to Indian values of family and community collapse as we realize that many of these workers (including students, without whom undergraduate teaching in universities would simply collapse) do not have health insurance – a disgraceful feature of the richest country in the world today. In a country that holds so many physicians from India in high regard and where the Indian community is increasingly considered to be affluent, the silence of the helpless continues to grow. Sure, there are scattered examples of generous arrangements between individuals, but the picture is less than heartening. The irony of seeking dual citizenship and guarding the 'Indian' values of community, family and our cultural character while we contribute to the segregatory and selfish aspects of American society is not lost on those who have a broader view of the Indian American diaspora.

Perhaps the most generalized and prominent pressure on finding ourselves in a strange land we now call home is the old struggle between assimilation and independence. Indians do not have any exclusive claim on this dilemma any more than other groups of immigrants. Our plight is shared and separated from that of the others. This dialectic remains at the heart of what it means to be an Indian and what it means to be an Indian American. Much of it depends on the political make up of this land and much more on the politics of multiculturalism itself.

The Indian community finds itself gathering strength in numbers, in its ability to flex financial muscle and an overall prominence in the social role accorded to it because of numerous cultural, social and historical achievements of Indians and their country of origin. Despite all this, they cannot erase their racial identity in this race-conscious society. This aspect shapes their external, social identity in the United States. The polarized tensions between the African Americans, who have an entirely different claim on the notion of synthetic, dual identity, and white Americans of European origins, have formed an axis of how race is seen across the spectrum. The degree of tolerance is often shaped by one's place on that continuum.

As the social and policy debates become more intensely polemic and polarizing, Indians find themselves in a dubious position of being exploited and privileged at the same time. Their various tones of skin colour have been accommodating in place of American blacks on issues such as affirmative action or general racial make-up of companies, universities and other social organizations. That is, in many cases, the system has discovered that one can fulfil the requirements of a racially diverse group by choosing darker Indians who are considered less troublesome, sometimes more competent and no doubt socially advantaged. It is entirely possible in this nexus of competing forces of accommodation and social needs that Indians find themselves targeted for racial bias precisely because of their skin tone and general social success, both of which invite scorn and categorization in a society that attempts to be egalitarian but lives by the old dictum of fair skin superiority.

Various hate-crimes and dispersed incidents at workplace and in everyday lives of individuals will attest to this complex picture of what it means to be brown in a rainbow of uneasy multiculturalism. The recent climate of Arab bashing has only exacerbated the situation, exposing the hypocrisies and pretensions of this society. Stories are abundant since the time of the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979, where a number of brown skinned students from India were roughed up and intimidated, especially in the hinterland of Middle and South America.

The much-publicized attacks and a murder of a Sikh in the South only underscore this deep ignorance among Americans who cannot distinguish in their hatred between the beards and turbans of Osama Bin Laden and his cohorts, and those of Sikhs or anyone else's. A country so deeply oblivious to the complexities of global cultural scene was woken up by the attacks of terrorists. But much of the awareness quickly degenerated into an expression of its deep-rooted beliefs and misplaced conceptions of the world it dominates.

Some years ago, Pat Buchanan, a right-wing talk show host and a flaming Republican who has attempted Presidency, spoke about how difficult it is to open doors to immigrants from all over the world. In rhetoric reminiscent of the other dark era of the last century, he told his fellow Americans and policy-makers that it is good social policy to bring Europeans to this country because they are easy to assimilate. Increasing the variety of this populace by choosing people simply based on merit or need as it is mostly done now, would simply corrode the country's basic fabric which is founded on European ethic, as Buchanan sees it. While much of that is worth paying attention to, simply to

understand the diagnosis of racism on the right, Buchanan identified the dilemma of assimilation quite well.

If this were a truly egalitarian society and one founded on the principles of immigration (not to speak of the injustices done to the 'other' Indians), it would be possible to see one's place here as that of equal but different, of similarity and difference. Indians, one can assume, are negotiating this at two levels, cultural and political. As we have seen, the pressures to absorb an alien culture into your own were met with much less success among the early immigrants, now the first generation elders, rather than the recent and second (or third) generation members. But their social involvement plays out quite differently at the political level. Since politics or the theatre of politics proper is quite simplistic and bipolar in this country, with conservatives and liberals or Republicans and Democrats occupying the easy poles, one has to navigate one's place in a less complicated land.

Since the mainstream of this country, thanks to the likes of Buchanan who remind us, was founded on European identity, Indians have found themselves aligned with those who fought for civil rights and who valued the core of the principles of free speech and freedom that are unrestricted in the spirit and letter of the law. In some quarters, it is a given, as such alliances are considered natural, losers bound together in a common cause, in an empathetic bond and a shared political purpose. One would assume that is still the case and the sensibility of Indians may be with the larger multicultural project of this country.

But Indians bring layered complexity to this problem. The students in the sciences and engineering, doctors and technicians in the computer

economy and a general excellence in the natural sciences have dominated the Indian community of immigrants. As some of us in the humanities have observed, the community's outlook is dominated by technical or instrumental rationality. Their orientation separates them from the question of values and binds them to the efforts of technical, competitive efficiency.

This group, quite large on several fronts, is known for its extraordinary competence and professionalism. But it also embodies a servile submission to political pressures since these were supposed to be out of our ambit of establishing ourselves. That includes a growing business class of Indians in this country. Conservatism has always been a good ally of instrumental rationality. For them America represents a land where dreams come true and rags-to-riches is not a fairytale but a distinct possibility. The intense attractiveness of this country to others, one argues, is founded on this perspective. One does not live by politics alone, one works hard with faith in the system so as to put food on the table.

The recent rise of the candidacy of Bobby Jindal for the governorship of Louisiana positioned against the first time woman candidate from the Democratic Party (who finally won) underscores this approach. For him, a simplistic faith in the conservative principles is identical to the offerings of this nation as such. One could prosper with plenty of opportunity and less of regulation. A dedication to the principles of free enterprise is much more valued than that of free speech or social responsibility. The continuing dallying of fundraisers and political action committees by Indians for the right comes close to endorsing this blend of blindness to one's place in this complex world with the uncritical

endorsement of the ideas that fundamentally delineate us in the first place.

Among the newly emerging chattering class, the issue of representation has become central in every sense. Dinesh DeSouza, Ramesh Ponnuru and Fareed Zakaria among them have occupied airtime and visibility in the public sphere. Their Indian-ness pronounced, they have become powerful spokesmen of mainstream positions. Someone like DeSouza is more of a wonder child to the right as he presents views more fervently to the right than those who seem to lose the energy to defend them. In a country that values free speech, this would be a commendable achievement were it not for the vapid lack of any self-conscious, historical perspective of what suffering is and how it can be alleviated.

But this group believed in the power of rhetoric and they are the rising stars of the media and politics. Their racial identity is entirely hidden to them in their own discourse, as it becomes the first screen through which the rest of the culture sees them. Fareed Zakaria's claim to a place in the corridors of power (as editor of the international desk at *Newsweek* and a prominent commentator on US policy on television) takes him to new heights as he espouses full military campaigns where democracy does not exist while advocating authoritarian governance in places where democracy isn't endemic. Along with the triumph of the instrumental rationality of science and business minded Indians, this is an equally glorious victory for those speaking for power without realizing how power speaks through you.

Zakaria and DeSouza would be eminently ordinary in the panorama of Indian identity. But for Americans in the public sphere, they are emblem-

atic of Indian identity. It is a vision of multiculturalism, where individual representatives of diverse cultures are so absorbed in the mainstream that they achieve exemplary status for all Americans. If one is finding a place in this culture as an Indian, one negotiates one's relationship to the views and presence of the rising stars whose Indian-ness is marketed cleverly by those who use them.

One also negotiates social identity in the sphere of media representations. For over ten years, an immensely popular animation series on prime time, *The Simpsons*, has constructed a persona of Apu, a convenience store vendor, who typifies his presence as an Indian through a thick accent, a consistent devotion to deities in the workplace, orthodox views on community, a selfish and protective approach to customers and his occasional forays into lust. So broad is his popularity that Apu has come to represent Indians to most television viewers. His accent has become so common now that most other characters on television shows use it to lampoon all things Indian. And in a move typical of parochial ignorance, Apu's accent has been adopted as a generalized diction for all people east of Europe. It is not surprising that Osama Bin Laden and other brown skinned terrorists now speak like Apu in the American media.

The problem of representation of the other in the West has always been a troublesome one. The stereotypes and caricatures have long been a privilege of the powerful. That defines one major dimension of the relationship between Europe and its other. American media has not been immune to this and, if anything, has carried the torch quite well. Apu merely leads the pack of the buffoons; the heavy accented cab drivers, the clumsy Harondi Bakhshi's (memorialized by

the inimitable Peter Sellers) and the typical doctors or dentists and like Apu, the managers and staff at Dunkin Donuts or area convenient stores.

The issue is complex as we find that this constructed identity is what one lives with; it is the screen that one wears in each encounter with the world. It is never too amusing to see someone sport a surprise at the fluency of English spoken by Indians, the simple assumptions that everyone is a computer wizard, or that doctors are made brilliant and kind in India, or that it is Kama Sutra that causes the population explosion in the land of mystery and wonder. One lives with these issues in diasporic identity, which is never a given, never a peaceful state of being and never a comfortable phase of growth in between two lands.

Meditations on identity are best shaped in the academic world. Identity has become a buzzword in scholarly circles, a fashion of intellectual pursuit and also a feat of advance in reflective thought. It is a mixed world and the most heartening aspect of it is that in a changing and challenging world, it is still a formidable issue for scholars. One of the most common refrains is that identity is not a static idea, that it is constantly changing and being modified. In a world that once reverberated with struggles defined over the dimensions of class, race and gender, it is identity that rules intellectual circles.

The focus on identity leads to a two-fold approach. One foregrounds identity itself, a fundamental notion of who we are and what we have become. Identity politics is a veritable feast of self-proclaimed positions, statements and ideals. In a rapidly mainstreamed field of cultural studies, with its specific provinces in universities, scholarly conferences and publications,

identity is something tangible to hold on to, while proclaiming that it is a fluid concept, given to the whims of social and cultural factors, which seem to have a logic of their own.

A somewhat more productive approach comes from an exploration of other forces that produce identities, which is nothing more than a window to the world of real politics. The focus here is less on self-gratifying proclamations of identity and more on the complex forces and social conditions which shape them. We are now in the realm of social and historical analysis rather than confessional psychology. This would be a provocative aspect of intellectual work if it were not for the divide between intellectual labour and the real world of political forces, a divide, which is as wide as, well, the Grand Canyon itself.

The world of intellectual inquiry in the United States is showing signs of enjoying the surplus luxury of analyzing the world by removing oneself from it. Diasporic studies are fast becoming a fertile ground for practising this remote control intellectual pursuit. It is common to witness conference sessions and papers with titles such as 'The homing of diaspora, the diasporizing of home', which claim the art of name-dropping or cursory attention to revolutionary concepts of exile or political responsibility of diasporas around the world. The American academy is uniquely situated to exploit this divide with the real world of people.

All of this forms the context of diasporic identity for Indian intellectuals who are one of the most complex and dynamic of such phenomenon in the contemporary world. Unlike their counterparts in the realm of science and technology, scholars in the humanities are, by and large, socially conscious and progressive and far

removed from the trappings of power. The identity of those who analyze and reflect on issues of identity with scholarly fervour is indeed instructively engaging.

With the rise of postcolonial and cultural studies and a healthy place for the study of diasporas, the presence of intellectuals on university and college campuses has been strong. Led by some brilliant work by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha, one notices a whole cadre of faculty members and graduate students working on these issues. All of this work is certainly affected by the language games in cultural studies, with obscurity, esoteric tones, ritualistic lip service to revolutionary concepts and a deliberate distance from the contingencies of real politics. It raises anew the issues of intellectual responsibility in our time, of the role of the public intellectuals, of academics willing to engage in public sphere outside of their own parochial enclaves of conferences, journal publications and tenure battles.

This irony of the divide between the stated political ambition of post-colonial discourse on identity and the vast separation from the problems and spheres of political issues of our time is at the heart of the enterprise of political engagement by Indian intellectuals in the United States. In this country, tenure and resources of academic institutions provide a protection that is unparalleled around the world. But instead of using that security as an engine for political involvement in the public sphere, we retreat into scholarly reflection that is without accountability. This challenge is by no means exclusive to intellectuals of Indian origin, but it is certainly a challenge that will test the viability of the project of diaspora, of being in two places and belonging nowhere.

Profile of a diasporic community

SONALDE DESAI and RAHUL KANAKIA

COULD we expect a heterogeneous country like India to spawn a homogenous diaspora? Of course not. Historical legacies from Mother India as well as the peculiarities of American immigration policies have ensured the diversity of the Indian diasporic community in the United States.

Early Indian migration into the United States began around 100 years ago when farmers from Punjab began appearing on the West coast of the United States, seeking work in the lumber mills of Washington state and large farms of California. They were followed by students who in 1913 established the Hindustan Ghadar Party, seeking India's liberation from colonial rule. They could not have chosen a worse moment in American history to make their appearance in American society. Like the early 21st century, the first decade of the 20th century was a time of immigration into

the United States with nearly a million people arriving annually on American shores. As a percentage of population, the foreign born accounted for 15% of the population as opposed to about 9% today (Spain, 1999). However, most of these immigrants came from Europe and the non-white immigrants—including the Chinese, Japanese and Indians—faced a substantial backlash.

Fears of a 'Hindoo invasion' resulted in riots which drove out Indians from Bellingham, Washington and subsequently many efforts were made to limit the number of Indians arriving in the US. Since non-whites were not eligible for naturalization, it was easy to exclude Asian inflow by passing laws that restricted immigration of individuals ineligible for citizenship and land ownership by non-citizens. Indians found it distasteful to be lumped with the 'Asiatic races' and tried to contest their exclu-

sion on the grounds that an Aryan Caucasian ancestry made them white rather than Asian.¹ However, the landmark case of US Vs. Bhagat Singh Thind in 1923 stripped Indians of this fig leaf and declared them ineligible for citizenship.

Restrictions on Indian immigration continued even after these racist naturalization laws against them were removed in 1946. Until 1965, nationality based immigration quotas only allowed a small number to migrate to the United States. It was only after these quotas were abolished in 1965 that much of the Indian immigration to the United States took place and, once the gates were opened, people of Indian origin became a force to be reckoned with.

People of Indian origin in the United States, those who classify themselves as Asian Indians on Census forms, come in many different flavours. Some are the classic Indian immigrants of the popular imagination: those who were born in India and migrated to the United States. But there are Indians from Fiji and Guyana, many come via Britain and Uganda and then there are the second generation immigrants, those who were born

in the United States. Some classify themselves as Asian Indians alone, others are products of mixed racial heritage and claim multiple racial categories. As shown in Figure 2, in 2000, only about 53% of those who classify themselves as Indian Americans were born in India. About 35% claim Indian as a single identity but were born either in the United States or come from other diasporic communities in England, Africa or the Caribbean, including Pakistan. Another 12% are multi-racial and were not born in India.

The public perception of Indian-Americans tends to focus on Indians born in India who migrated to the United States. However, the demographic composition presented here suggests that this group represents only a portion of the Indian-Americans. Children of these immigrants as well as various diasporic communities migrating from the United Kingdom and Africa form a significant minority. Among Indians born overseas and living in the United States, about 60% are born in the US and about 40% have migrated from other countries. This number of second generation Indians will grow over time as the immigrant wave of the 1990s

settles and has children in the United States.

This creates an interesting dilemma for the Indian community in the United States and often divides the community. Many universities, for example, have two Indian student associations—one consisting of immigrant students, the other formed by second generation students. These groups have different interests and forms of identification with India. While immigrant Indians are aware of social and political issues in India and often have strong opinions about it, the second generation have an attachment to Indian dance, music and other cultural icons as a way of building their own identify, but may or may not have a strong attachment to India herself.

The Statue of Liberty, designed to welcome immigrants to the American shores bears an inscription, 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breath free.' But if we look at the Indian American population in the United States, it is not India's huddled masses that have migrated, but rather her privileged. In fact, they are even more privileged than the native-born American white

FIGURE 1
India-born Population in the US

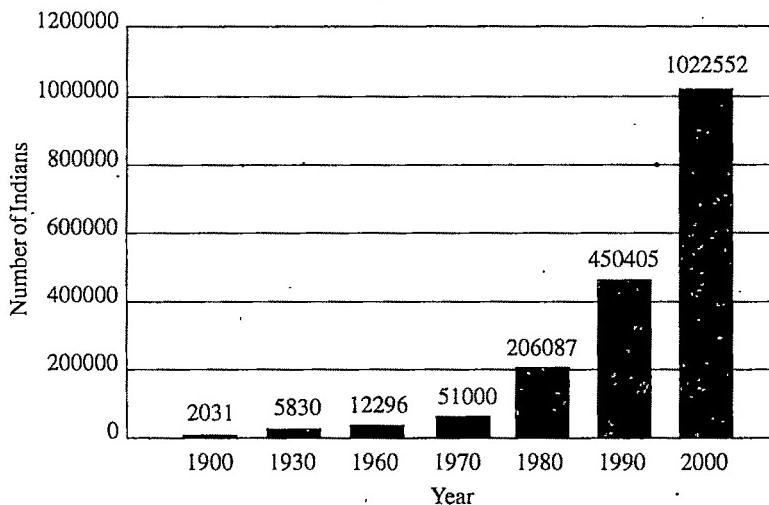
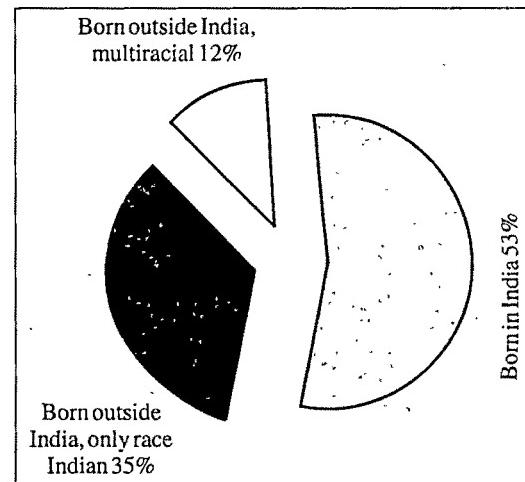


FIGURE 2
Composition of Indian American Population, 2000



population. Part of this privilege stems from the nature of immigration policies. While an Indian marginal farmer may want to migrate to the United States, he is unlikely to get a visa. In order to get a visa, he must either prove his value to an American employer (while not taking away a job from an American citizen) or must have a close relative already in the United States. This has led to migration of skilled professionals and their families.

Table 1 compares Indian-Americans, white and black populations on educational attainment. Indians clearly have a strong educational advantage with only about 26% of whites above the age of 24 having completed at least a bachelor's degree, as opposed to 63% of the Asian Indian population. The disparity between Indians and African Americans is even more striking with only 15% of black population having completed a BA or BS.

This high education level is also reflected in the jobs Indian Americans hold. A majority of the Indian Americans consists of managers, engineers and computer or math professionals; many are doctors and health care specialists. At the same time, Indians are substantially less likely to be in occupations like military personnel, transportation and production workers,

TABLE 1

Percent with education...	Indian American	White	Black
Below 9th Grade	5	6	8
9-12 Grade	18	40	50
Some College	34	23	15
Bachelor's Degree	30	17	9
Master's Degree	22	6	4
Professional Degree	8	2	1
Doctorate	5	1	0
Total	100	100	100

police, firemen, artists and writers than the white population.

Although census data provide us with a broad categorization of the occupations Indian Americans engage in, it is at a narrower level of specialization that occupational concentration becomes more interesting. While Indian Americans can be found in many different fields of work, some fields seem to be particularly attractive to these immigrants.

Education and immigration restrictions explain Indian-American predominance in computer and information technology fields, but over and above these, social networks must play an important role in shaping the

TABLE 2

Occupational Distribution of Indian American Population Above Age 25 in the United States, 2000

Occupation	Male	Female
Managers	11.84	5.02
Business Specialists	2.19	1.49
Financial Specialist	2.52	2.87
Computer/Math Profess	19.84	6.9
Engineer/Architect	7.54	1.19
Scientists (Physical & Social)	2.84	2.21
Social Services	0.57	0.61
Law	0.44	0.68
Education/Teacher	3.06	4.69
Artists/writers	0.89	0.91
Health care/doctors	7.72	10.85
Health care support/aids	0.45	2.03
Police/fireman	0.79	0.18
Waiters/Cook	2.4	1.85
Janitors	0.87	1.01
Personal Service	0.37	1.79
Sales	10.02	7.44
Admin. Asst.	5.25	10.97
Farming/fishing	0.26	0.25
Construction	1.3	0.04
Mechanics	1.93	0.21
Production Workers	5.64	5.45
Transport Workers	4.81	1.01
Military	0.05	0.01
Unemployed	0.22	0.76
Out of Labour Force	6.21	29.58
Total	100	100

occupational choices of Indian Americans. How else can we explain the fact that so many motels are run by Gujaratis and North Indian taxi drivers dominate the New York taxi scene? The concentration of Dunkin Donut franchises in the hands of Gujarati families is particularly interesting, if often ignored. We have always wondered what draws Gujarati families to frying sweet doughnuts and have few answers. It may be that social networks make it easier for them to acquire franchises, or possibly working in a meatless environment is appealing, or that frying doughnuts seems akin to frying *jalebis* in the sweet marts of Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Indian high technology entrepreneurs were founders of only 3% of the technology companies started between 1980 and 1984, while they were running 10% of the technology companies started between 1995 and 2000 (Saxenian, 1999). Social networks organized by the entrepreneurial communities in the San Francisco Bay area (such as The Indus Entrepreneurs) often facilitate entrepreneurship among other members of the community.

Not surprisingly, Indian American households are also richer than other households. Our calculations, based on a 5% sample of people who filled out long forms in the 2000 census, show that the median income of Indian American households is substantially higher than that of the white

1. Interestingly even the modern day Indian Americans seem to find it difficult to be lumped with Asians from Japan, China and Vietnam. Most Asian studies programmes at universities and Asian Student Association draw far fewer Indians than Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese American students.

2. Median household income reflects the threshold at which 50 percent of the household are above and 50 per cent are below that income level.

3. Includes Hispanic whites.

or African-American population. In 2000, the white households of the United States³ had a median income of about \$44,500, the African-American households had median income of \$29,000 and the Indian-American households had a median income of about \$63,500. Indian Americans have the highest household income among all racial and ethnic groups in America.

This higher income of Indian-American households is attributable to a number of factors. First, as discussed above, highly educated Indians migrate to the United States and take up better paying professional jobs. Two, like immigrants from other countries and continents (Portes, 2000), immigrant Indians also invest heavily in building their future—living frugally, obtaining higher education and credentials, taking risks in setting up new businesses. Indian Americans also carry forward the Indian extended family tradition and tend to live in larger households with more potential workers, increasing their overall household income.

Ironically, while Indian American men are rarely to be found without a job, the number of Indian American women in the labour force is far smaller than comparable age white or African American women. While more than 70% of the white women between ages of 25 and 60 work, only about 58% of the Indian-American women are employed. One can view this lower labour force participation on the part of Indian American women from different perspectives. An absence of work related external contacts and lack of social networks may reduce acculturation while maintaining the grip of patriarchy prevalent in Indian culture. At the same time, women's ability to remain out of the labour force also reflects higher family income and

greater availability of time to devote to childrearing.

The statistics presented above show Indian Americans to be a privileged community in America. This privilege is reflected in many different aspects of life including education, income, access to academic enrichment programmes for children, and living in lower crime neighbourhoods. One of the markers of this privilege is increasing attention directed towards Indian Americans by American politicians. Substantial contributions to Democratic as well as Republican candidates by Indian Americans has led to increasing clout of Indians in American politics, far beyond what their slender electoral strength entitles them.

However, this portrait of privilege masks many inequalities within the Indian American community and does disservice to the poor among the community. It is clear that the Indian American community is very diverse and while some Indian Americans are very wealthy, about 12.2% of Indian Americans live below the poverty line, slightly more than the figure for whites (11.9%). A focus on achievements of some often obscures the need of the others, particularly the elderly and the female household heads.

'We came to the US with two suitcases, and look what we have achieved through hard work' is a sentiment often reflected in much of the Indian American discourse. However, it underplays the privileged position of highly educated IITians and doctors even as they arrived in the US with only a few dollars in their pockets. Ignoring the role of their educational achievements and social networks often makes Indian Americans intolerant of other minorities' struggles and distances them from other people of colour in the United States.

This distance is reflected in many aspects of their behaviour. Indian American shop owners may work in minority dominated areas of Chicago and Los Angeles, but they rarely live there. Affirmative action programmes geared to help African American and Hispanic students is often criticized by many Indian Americans and sometimes tends to position them against other people of colour rather than being a part of them. Dinesh DeSouza (2002) has emerged as one of strongest critics of affirmative action and he often draws on his vantage point as an immigrant from India to argue that affirmative action hurts and degrades African Americans.

This distance between Indian Americans and the disadvantaged sections of American society can easily make Indian Americans targets of racist attacks as experienced by Korean shop owners in the Los Angeles riots. Small scale incidents already occur in diverse locations including the dot buster incidents in New Jersey.

Indian Americans seem to be the best ambassadors for India in the United States. Their growing influence in American business and politics is reflected in the warm reception Prime Minister Vajpayee received from President Clinton on his 2000 visit, and relative even-handedness on the part of the Bush government in recent Indo-Pak disputes despite Pakistan being a major ally in the war on terrorism. However, how precisely Indian Americans use this influence remains to be seen. As described above, the Indian Americans are part of an elite group both within and outside India. This elite conservatism, when combined with distance from India, may well encourage them to take more conservative stands than what the progressive forces in India might desire. For example, when the Commission

on Religious Freedom, an advisory body to the United States Congress, held its hearings on the Gujarat riots, some Indian Americans agitated to discredit its findings and to ensure the appointment of a Hindu to the commission.

The growing distance between the interests of first and second generation Indian Americans forms another axis along which faultlines have begun to emerge. Second generation Indian Americans often have a strong interest in Indian culture, dance, music and art, but their connection with socio-political realities of India remains limited and a few visits to grandparents and relatives is the sum total of their exposure to the realities of India. Ironically, many young Indian Americans try to learn about India through college courses and South Asian studies programmes but lack of study abroad programmes in Indian universities limit their ability to experience Indian realities first hand. Unless this distance can be bridged it seems likely that while future generations of Indian Americans will continue to connect with Indian culture, their connection with flesh and blood India will grow increasingly distant.

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Arts and the diaspora

VIDYA DEHEJIA

WHO would have thought that the word diaspora, once inextricably linked with exile, loss and forced dislocation, and closely associated with the Jewish experience, would so substantially change its connotation as to become the generic term used to describe the South Asian migrant communities who have chosen to live away from their original homeland. An early study of diasporas, dating to 1986, defined the term as 'the segment of a people living outside their homeland.' Perhaps in recognition of the simplistic nature of this definition, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* was launched in New York in 1991. Its founding editor, Khachig Tololyan, recently reflected upon the choice of the word transnational in its subtitle, and commented that it is particularly suitable as 'it contains the root term "nation", which was and remains indispensable to thinking about diasporas;' certainly that is profoundly so with the South Asian diaspora.

In the United States today, one may justifiably speak of the South Asian communities as a 'diaspora by design'.¹ The post-1965 diaspora, and more particularly that of the last

twenty years, is an intended dispersal; usually, though not invariably, it is the result of a deliberate decision to migrate, accompanied, of course, by the often unanticipated problems of territorial dislocation, and the equally unforeseen issues of relocation within a new cultural ethos. While the Indian diaspora's links to the homeland are incredibly strong and while there is deep nostalgia for life as lived in the homeland, it is safe to say that only a token proportion of this 'diaspora by design' has any intention of returning to the homeland.

The financial circumstances in which much of the post-1965 diaspora finds itself allows its members the luxury of shuttling backwards and forwards between two 'home' countries, one of which affords them financial and job satisfaction, and the other the social and cultural support system that renews them to return to the US. With the availability of dual citizenship, a symbolic and formal procedure of deep significance for those who had to renounce South Asian citizenship, the US diaspora seems set to live a comfortable hyphenated existence. Interestingly, the invariable intention to return to the homeland that was part of the original connotation of diaspora has changed even in the case of Jewish communities.

1. Kamala Visweswaran, 'Diaspora by Design: Flexible Citizenship and South Asians in US Racial Formations', *Diaspora* 6:1, 1997.

Much has been written on the differences between the pre- and post-1965 South Asian diasporas, especially in the arena of qualifications and social status. Undoubtedly, the post-1965 diaspora, part of the opening up of the US to highly qualified migrants from South Asia, changed the perception of Americans towards these communities which became an increasingly visible part of US multi-ethnic cities. The much-publicized California dotcom culture is part of this scenario.

Current American policy, once strongly geared towards assimilation, now appears to have moved towards an acceptance, even an embrace, of the concept of multiculturalism or pluralism. And reacting to this unstated, but patently palpable atmosphere, a range of diverse ethnic communities are reasserting their differences, all the way down to the emphasis, clearly audible on National Public Radio, on the authentic pronunciation of often complex diasporic names. If Sampath and Rajnikant had come to the US in the last decade or two, there would never have been a store abbreviated to 'Sam & Raj'.

To speak of the diaspora and the arts, I should clarify what I mean by that somewhat nebulous term 'art'. For the purposes of this article, the term refers largely to the so-called fine arts of sculpture and painting, both ancient and modern. Such art objects are initially purchased or sponsored by dealers and auction houses who exhibit them in their galleries; when acquired by private collectors or museums these objects move into displays in private homes or into the permanent collections of museums. They are the subject of public admiration, and of scrutiny and study by specialists in the field of art history, a discipline that is barely recognized in South Asia.

Architecture is a third distinct facet of the fine arts; while obviously not a collectible as such, architectural plans and drawings form part of museum collections. In addition, of course, the construction of monuments, especially of temples, mosques, and gurudwaras, is sponsored by both individuals and associations. While this essay perforce deals only with issues of consumption when speaking of ancient art, both the production and the consumption of art are of relevance with the contemporary. The immense field of the performing arts, music and dance, film and theatre, in which the diaspora displays considerable interest and direct involvement, is the subject of another essay.

Temples in Flushing, New York, were consecrated in the 1970s, but the planning for the majority commenced in the 1980s with the escalating growth of the diaspora. The increasing awareness of the need for a structure that would cater to religious needs, function as a community centre, and serve as a focus for festivals, marriages, dance *arangetrams*, and the like, led to this explosion in building activities. The Hindu temple in the US has, in many ways, returned to its original function as the focus of sacred, cultural and social activities, much as the ancient temple, say the Meenakshi in Madurai, was in pre-colonial and even colonial times.

The South Asian diaspora is marked by a strong pride in its cultural heritage, and a shared nostalgia for the activities that formed part of the experience of 'home' – festivals, fairs and food, music and dance, ceremonies and rituals, dress and adornment. In one way or another, South Asian communities have recreated the possibilities of experiencing all this in the US. Their temple building activities, in particular, are instances of the diaspora seeking its roots, a need to assert and emphasize a meaningful identity. There are a minimum of 450 Hindu temples in the US (some sources speak of over 600). Several are modest structures not identifiable from the exterior as 'exotic' buildings; architectural and sculptural detailing is often reserved for the interior alone.

But several major temples – 27 were featured in a recent book devoted to the US temples² – herald their purpose unmistakably. A few temples like the Venkatesvara temple at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the Ganapati tem-

A majority of the US temples are based on the South Indian model with a gopuram gateway providing an imposing entrance into a walled enclosure that houses the main shrine or shrines. Part of the reason for this architectural preference seems to have arisen from the prominence gained by Ganapati Sthapathi and Mutthiah Sthapati, both doyens of South Indian architecture, who became renowned figures within India for their sculptural and architectural activities. They were also willing to travel to the US, work with members of the diaspora in the planning stages, and to send skilled workers from India, as well as pre-fabricated stone and bronze images for installation in the US temples. A growing number of diaspora architects are today part of such continuing building activities, often having started as junior collaborators of one of the two Indian *sthatpatis*.

A welcome move to downplay sectarian differences is seen in the names of many temples. For instance, there is the Shiva-Vishnu temple in Lanham, Maryland, twelve miles from the centre of the nation's capital, Washington DC, and the Shiva-

2. Mahalingum Kolapen, *Hindu Temples in North America: A Celebration of Life*. Winter Park: Titan Graphics, 2002.

Vishnu temple in Davie, Florida. Several other temples across the country identify themselves by state (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Southern California), or by city (Atlanta, Dayton), but merely title themselves 'Hindu Temple', 'Hindu Temple Society', 'Hindu Community and Cultural Center', 'Hindu Samaj Temple', 'Hindu Community Organization', and the like. Even when temples specify their dedication to Vishnu or Shiva, calling themselves the Ranganatha, the Venkatesvara, or the Meenakshi temple, they invariably contain shrines for an entire, often bewildering, range of deities. The heterogeneity of the diaspora is, quite obviously and understandably, a replication of the religious, linguistic, regional, and caste diversity of the homeland.

While the diaspora is substantially involved in the construction and support of temples, such patronage does not turn into a wider involvement with the ancient artistic tradition of pre-colonial India. The temple images, richly dressed and adorned with jewels and flowers, are approached by the devotee with devotion, and not as works of art. Images on the walls of the structure, usually modelled from stucco in the US temples, are indeed visible, but are not the object of viewing by any but the occasional American visitor. To view as 'art' figures from temples, frequently of sacred import, requires new ways of thinking that are not part of the diaspora's immediate past experience.

So the generosity of the diaspora evident in the support of temple construction and embellishment is not forthcoming when it comes to enabling a museum's purchase of an important ancient stone or bronze image for its collection or in sustaining the museum's effort to mount a major exhibition of South Asian art.

Nor indeed, one might add, does the diaspora display interest in supporting university positions in the fields of fine arts, art history, literature, music, and the like, as against positions in economics or politics. At the same time, 'cultural' events are a priority. For instance, in 2003 the Association of Indians in America succeeded in persuading The White House to host the first celebration of the Hindu festival of diwali; further lobbying is directed towards having diwali declared an optional US holiday.

According to the 2000 Census, close to 1.7 million Indians and over 150,000 Pakistanis live in the US. Those who participated in the census questionnaire, which allowed multiple possibilities of evasion on questions of origin, are more willing to believe private surveys that estimate a total of four million South Asians in the US. Is this sizeable diaspora interested in participating in the cultural ethos of the US in which art and museums play a major role?

One in every 480 adults in the US, over the age of 18, is a museum volunteer, a somewhat startling fact that highlights the major role played by museums, which rank among the top three family vacation destinations. Statistics reveal that every day 2.3 million people visit some 16,000 museums that are devoted variously to explicating art, history, science, military and maritime issues, as also flora and fauna by way of zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens (AAM 2003). Art museums constitute a more rarefied world but even so, no less than 648 institutions fall into this category. While South Asian art is a relative newcomer to the museum scene, at the start of the 21st century a dozen or more museums in major cities possess significant collections of South

Asian art, while increasing numbers of smaller institutions have started collecting in this under-represented area.

The prime purpose of museums across the world is, obviously, the acquisition, conservation and exhibition of the material cultures of people. South Asia's rich ancient remains, its stone sculptures and bronze images, its miniature paintings and its decorative arts, have become sought-after acquisitions. Museums in the United States place considerable weight on the institution's educational role and the need to communicate effectively with its audiences.

While the need to be centrally concerned with reception seems self-evident, museums have largely ignored the diaspora which could and should form a significant part of its constituency; the diaspora, in turn, has shown marked disinterest in visiting museums with South Asian collections. Why, it might be asked, should the diaspora take an interest in museums, with their displays that consist largely of numbers of damaged stone statues that once held pride of place on the walls of Hindu, Jain or Buddhist shrines? Or, indeed, of manuscript pages that were part of temple or palace collections? What relevance does this have for the diaspora?

Today it is widely recognized that museums and their exhibitions are not merely elegant sheltering spaces that present neutral or objective displays of objects; rather museums function as 'valorizing agencies' that give validity and authority to a culture through its displays. The act of choosing and displaying objects is a weighted decision and museums can be culturally and ideologically influential enterprises. Even the very banner hung in front of a museum is a case in point. When a major museum puts up a

banner for an Asian art show that is one-sixth the size of the adjoining banner for a European exhibition, visitors see this as conveying institutional values. The gallery space given to a particular culture is often perceived by visitors, and indeed by museum staff, as highlighting the importance of one cultural complex at the expense of another. Even having an established, well-regarded curator in a particular curatorial field is perceived as a museum's high regard for that field, and is usually viewed as being at the expense of some other area of expertise.

While I have referred to the South Asian diaspora as a single cosmopolitan community in the context of museum visitation, it is imperative to acknowledge the complex nature of the new cosmopolitanism/s. The diasporic community is incredibly diverse and includes not just the upper class elite whose circle of friends would include western museum-goers, but those from other strata of society to whom a museum visit is an unfamiliar concept.

With all the emphasis placed by newspapers like *India Abroad* on successful diasporic business men and women, political aspirants, government employees, lawyers, and the like, it may come as a surprise to find that a 2004 survey by the Asian American Federation reveals that one in five Indian American New Yorkers lives below the poverty line. And while slightly over half the Indian American adults in the city have a college degree, a quarter have not completed high school. 'Art' has a marginal role in many lives unless it be in the form of 'calendar art' which rarely forms part of an art museum collection, being considered more worthy of study in sociological, religious, or anthropological contexts.

To view as 'art' stone figures from temple walls, frequently of sacred import, requires new ways of thinking that are not part of immediate past experience. Such difficulties are faced not merely by those from the less wealthy segments of the diaspora. Those who have acquired success, wealth and status find themselves in the same conundrum; for many individuals, a 20th century bronze of, say god Krishna, is as good as the hugely expensive 14th century image that they have recently been persuaded into purchasing for their local museum.

It is interesting to note that two small-scale exhibitions mounted at the Sackler Gallery in 1995 and 1996 functioned, quite independent of curatorial or management intention, as sites of community building. 'Puja: Aspects of Hindu Devotion', displayed objects of cultural and ritual significance, both from the angle of the devotee and that of the art lover. The compact exhibition was tripartite and focused on the ritual worship of Shiva, Vishnu and Devi. It presented a temple shrine to Shiva, a home shrine to Vishnu and a wayside shrine to the goddess; each was presented first as a simulated sacred context, and then the three in-situ displays were juxtaposed with a standard museum-style presentation of similar objects as works of art.

Thus, the temple-shrine section of the exhibit commenced with a Shiva *linga*, dressed and adorned, and placed within a simulated shrine with trays of devotional offerings of fruit, flowers, and coconuts. The adjoining room provided a total contrast by displaying lingas, and mukhalingas, as works of art, placing them within glass cases with spotlights. The display proposed that the objects in the exhibition possessed equal validity in two very different contexts – as the focus of

devotion, and the object of admiration as works of art. The exhibition was attended by large numbers of Washington area South Asian diaspora who had heard of the exhibit largely through their involvement with the Shiva-Vishnu temple in Lanham, Maryland, whose chief priest had ritually dressed the *Shivalinga* prior to the opening of the exhibition.

Young teens of South Asian origin found themselves perplexed, even confounded, by viewing in a Smithsonian display, objects similar to those in their parents' homes where they were placed on kitchen or bedroom shelves, or in special *puja* rooms. For these teens feeling that ubiquitous, probably imagined, pressure to conform, it turned out to be a validation of cultural practices (of art too?) which they had hitherto faced with a degree of ambivalence if not actual discomfort. 'Puja' resonated with all levels – high, middle and low brow – of the cosmopolitan diaspora.

Another such experience was provided by 'Painted Prayers', an exhibition centering around a set of striking photographs of those ubiquitous threshold designs created by women in Indian homes, known variously as *kolam*, *rangoli*, *alpana* and the like. To emphasize the impermanent nature of these works of art, and their constant renewal, as also to stress their continuing relevance in India and overseas, women of the diasporic community were invited to create a different 'painted prayer' each weekend. A specially constructed large wooden platform, a foot high, was placed in an open area at the entrance to the show, and the creativity displayed by the local South Asian women attracted a substantial viewership.

This was an occasion tailor-made to stress Raymond Williams's dictum that 'culture is ordinary', that

Mughal miniature paintings, Vilayat Khan's ragas, and Satyajit Ray's films were no more 'culture' than women's daily 'art', bhangra rock, or a Bollywood musical. Yet, in highlighting the fact that the designs held symbolic meaning and were viewed as harbingers of the auspicious, the exhibition simultaneously emphasized the view of culture as 'the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation'.³ Both 'Puja' and 'Painted Prayers' were successful in appealing to members of the diaspora.

A 2001 Sackler exhibition dedicated to the display of some of the most exquisite imagery created anywhere in the world – bronzes of the Chola period in South India – once again attempted to draw the diaspora into the museum. To supplement the curatorial voice and provide a different perspective on the bronzes, practising Hindus from the greater Washington area were interviewed and their voices featured in a series of wall text-panels placed throughout the exhibition. Their interventions were varied; some provided personal and devotional approaches to individual bronzes, others expressed perplexity at seeing sacred images in a museum and questioned its appropriateness. Here, one might say, was an experiment in how 'the audience, a passive entity, becomes the community, an active agent'.⁴

In a further attempt to draw in visitors from the diaspora, who frequent the many Hindu temples in the greater Washington area but never

visit the museum, the education department came up with an extensive outreach programme in which it identified a group of teens of South Asian background and trained them to be 'exhibition guides'. It was determined that those members of the diaspora who would not normally visit the museum and attend a standard docent-led tour of Chola bronzes would indeed come to one 'advertised' in the temple and led by young people from their own community.

South Asian contemporary art, while constituting a recent entrant onto the US art market, with its auction houses and sales galleries, as well as the museum scene, has displayed an amazing vibrancy. In the last fifteen years, since Sotheby's and Christie's commenced their regular auctions of contemporary South Asian art, 20th century works have fetched high prices, and have begun to enter the precincts of museums. The artists whose works are auctioned are largely those who are established back home; younger artists are more often seen in the galleries of downtown New York. As yet, only one museum has a permanent gallery devoted to contemporary art, and that entirely because a local donor made a generous gift of a substantive part of his contemporary art collection.

In the field of private collectors, an interesting buyer profile has emerged that makes itself strikingly evident both during auction previews and in the auction room itself. Ancient art interests the white American collector while Americans of South Asian origin crowd into the contemporary displays. In fact, it is largely due to the buying power of South Asians that contemporary art today has a high enough profile for a handful of New York galleries, mostly in South Asian hands, to specialize in the contempo-

rary. As a corollary, one might note that in the case of dealerships in ancient South Asian art, the balance tilts slightly in favour of white American ownership.

Today, increasing numbers of successful contemporary artists are members of the South Asian diaspora. Some emphasize their heritage, acknowledge their inspiration to the colours and cultures back home, and take pride in having exhibitions in South Asia. Others, while acknowledging their indebtedness to ancient traditions, seem to wish to emphasize their position as US or world artists. Their approach to the display of their works in specialized museums that display only Asian art, like the Smithsonian's Freer and Sackler galleries, varies immensely. Some are delighted and consider it appropriate that their work be seen in the context of ancient art from South Asia. Others would prefer to display their work in museums of contemporary art, construing a display in an Asian art museum as a marginalization of their relevance.

What does the future hold, in terms of diasporic involvement with the arts of India, now that the US seems to have set aside the model of the melting pot that obliterated differences to create an indeterminate amalgam? Of course, there will always be a fresh wave of immigrants who can justifiably be described as diaspora. But what of that third generation, born in the US, more often than not with one American parent, for whom nostalgia for 'back home' is a distant theoretical issue? Will they continue to describe themselves as being of hyphenated origin? Children of the assimilation generation learned to value visits to exhibitions devoted to Impressionism and Cubism. Will the next generation turn, with greater or lesser interest, to a show on Chola bronzes?

3. John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999: 18.

4. Ivan Karp, 'Introduction', in Ivan Karp et al., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992: 12 (italics in original).

Constricting hybridity

RAJKA PURI

AUGUST 2000: The first international festival of Odissi, featuring three days of performances, seminars and lecture-demonstrations by major gurus, dancers, musicians, critics and scholars of the form is held in Washington, D.C.

May 2001: Thirty-five young Bharatanatyam dancers, members of a locally based company, perform Jataka tales to the music of Rimsky Korsakov and Tchaikovsky played by the hundred-piece Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

May 2002: Akram Khan, a Kathak-trained dancer, nurtured by the British cultural establishment as one of Britain's most promising young choreographers, premiers *Kaash* (with set design by Anish Kapoor, music by Nitin Sawney) in London, prior to being sent on a world tour.

June 2002: Andrew Lloyd Webber's production, *Bombay Dreams*,

with A. R. Rahman's music, book by Meera Sayal, and a cast made up largely of people of Indian origin, opens in London's West End, with its sights set on Broadway.

April 2003: Counter-tenor Bejun Mehta sings 'Guido' in Handel's *Flavio* at New York City Opera, going on to sing title roles in *Giulio Cesare* at the Pittsburgh opera, and *Orlando* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

April 2003: Five actors play call centre operators in Bangalore while multiple images flash onto several screens above them, in *Alladeen*, a collaborative project between York-based Moti Roti and New York's Builder's Company, which premiers in Ohio, then goes on tour to New York, Singapore and London.

Time was when in the countries of the Indian diaspora, the terms 'Indian' and 'performing arts' made

one think of traditional – largely ‘classical’ – forms of music and dance, with theatre subsumed under the latter category. The most valued performers were Indian, and lived in India. For anyone living abroad it was almost obligatory to go to India to study. The number of people exposed to these performers was relatively small and the impact they made on the population at large was minimal. True, Indian films – and film music – were hugely popular in many countries outside India, like Russia, Egypt and Ecuador. Even today, on sighting an Indian in, say, the medieval quarter of Fez, children begin singing *awaara hoon* and ask about Amitabh Bachchan, but these countries have few Indian settlers.

In the UK or US, one rarely saw a fellow Indian at the theatre, ballet, or symphony. Few people of Indian origin practised western art forms – one or two conductors, perhaps, and a couple of modern dancers. More often than not Indian dancers who came to study western forms were encouraged to go back and learn their own (‘classical’, ‘Indian’) dance forms – even if they were part Scottish, or Parsi, and more attracted to ballet than to Bharatanatyam.

The majority of producers and funding organizations abroad favoured ‘authenticity’. Thus few Indian artists experimented with their forms, or thought about choreography, composition, or set and costume design. Indian themes in the performing arts were, by and large, handled by non-Indians – playwrights, directors, composers, and dancers who created Indian characters, adapted epic stories, experimented with Indian rhythms, and projected *their* images of divine dancers like Shiva, Krishna, and Radha. ‘Plum’ Indian roles were usually played by non-Indians.

Then from the late eighties things began to change, both in India and within the fast-growing diaspora – especially in the United States and the UK.

With the opening up of the economy in India the world of the Indian performing artist also expanded. Now, apart from the government, a performer could turn to business houses as well as the general public to patronise her or his work. ‘General public’ included not just the swelling indigenous urban middle-class but also Indians living abroad, and those who were coming back home to work. This public, exposed to non-Indian art forms that expressed a modern world, looked for – indeed ‘demanded’ – the same relevance to contemporary life from their own art forms. Dancers, for example, were urged to explore contemporary themes, and to re-think their traditional forms, i.e. to ‘modernise’. Krishna became old hat; the ecological implications of the serpent Kaliya’s poisoning of Jamuna waters were ‘in’.

As India – and Indians – began to be noticed by the general public abroad, foreign artists turned to things Indian to broaden their own horizons. Different kinds of percussion, spoken drum syllables, and fast tempo vocalisation of *swara* passages joined the already ubiquitous use of *sitar* and *tabla* in flamenco and pop music, and in western film scores. Indian musicians who had to play for a pittance in Indian restaurants were now in demand to record with ‘mainstream’ musicians. Indian dancers were invited to perform on music videos; actors of Indian origin began to be cast in TV shows, and for theatrical productions with Indian themes.

The term ‘fusion’ began to be used both in India and the West. In India, more often than not, it meant

Indian music which had been given a ‘rock’, or western ‘pop-music’ feel, as when Asha Bhonsle re-issued her old hit songs to a disco beat. With dance, and outside India (in spite of discomfort with the word) ‘fusion’ was used to refer to any creative collaboration between different cultures, such as when flamenco dance met Kathak, or Zakir Hussein played a duet with a Japanese *shakuhachi* flautist. As more and more artists from Africa, South America, Asia, Europe and the US began to interact in performance, the very term ‘world music’, which before had referred to music in general from non-western cultures, now suggested cultural amalgams. The New York-based World Music Institute increasingly promoted cross-cultural encounters of which Indian musicians were often the mainstay.

As it became commercially viable to present foreign music groups and their recordings in India, Indians had more access to forms like Acid Bhangra and Disco Garba developed among immigrant communities abroad. The major exchange, however, was with the US and UK. Several fascinating musical forms like the ‘Chutney’ music of the Caribbean and the pop-folk music of Indic populations in Malagassy and Mauritius (which fuse inherited Vaishnav songs – sometimes in archaic Bhojpuri – with local rhythms) were side-tracked. They did not have general currency – either in India or among promoters of ‘global music’ in Paris, New York and London – because the populations from which they stem have little discourse with communities in India or other parts of the diaspora.

In theatre, the notion of a ‘world theatre’ drawn from several different cultures grew. India with its treasure of theatrical traditions had inspired pro-

ductions like Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* and Ariane Mnouchkine's *L'Indeade*. Casts were international, breaking down boundaries between different ethnicities: a Nigerian played Bhima, a Japanese actor was cast as Drona. The influence of such productions led to more works which incorporated techniques, conventions – as well as actors – from Indian theatre. A 1996 French production of Moliere's *Tartuffe* set in Turkey began with the percussive sounds of a street vendor playing Rajasthani *kartaal*. A 2000 *Hamlet* featured three Indians out of a cast of eight.

The most significant opening up within the arts – particularly with the younger generation – was the breakdown of the divide between 'classical' and 'popular', 'traditional' and 'modern'. One evening a classically trained percussionist might accompany *bansuri*-player Hari Prasad Chaurasia; the next day he could be part of an ensemble led by the cellist Yo Yo Ma. On a third he might record with a pop group up for a Grammy Award. Similarly, the same dancer who performed a charming Bharatanatyam *varnam* one night could the next evening present an innovative dance-theatre piece which explored violence in contemporary society.

The geographical boundaries of the world of Indian performing arts also expanded. Artists spent longer stints abroad, creating works that made an impact on performing arts at home. Many of these works could be seen by fellow artists – either at international festivals, or when the works toured India. As more and more performing artists lived bi-continental existences, they established schools abroad. A new generation of performers emerged who had been trained outside India – and who were taken seriously at home.

The dissolution of distinctions between 'Indian-born' and 'foreign-born', or 'Indian-trained' and 'foreign-trained' reflect a commonality among performing artists in India and in the diaspora. Even if the specific social imperatives that influence them are distinct – and they are – they feed into a common pool that affects practice both in India and abroad.

Let us now look at the current state of the arts. First of all, it is important to recognise that the traditional arts are alive and well – because it is these arts which give an Indian identity to new developments. Also, that they are likely to be around for a long time precisely *because* they are not frozen in time. Energised by the various influences on them they continue to develop and live in relative ease with the new directions taken by some practitioners. Indeed, as noted earlier, the same person who sings a traditional Carnatic *kutcheri* concert at the Madras music festival might the very next month do a concert tour with western musicians who accompany her on a church organ, a *shanka* and a *didjeridoo* among other instruments.

Another contributing factor is a continued adherence to traditional pedagogy, both in India and abroad. Dancers still learn basic steps, components of dances, and a preliminary repertoire common to most styles of a specific dance form like Bharatanatyam, Odissi or Kathak. Musicians are formed in the age-old way by learning *raag* and *taal*, the manipulation of *swaras* and *bols*, and mastery of specific forms of song: *khayaal*, *thumri*, *raagam-thaanam*, *thillana*. They all graduate with a debut concert and get a seal of approval from senior practitioners. Thus new work, whether in a traditional or innovative mode, comes from a strong grounding in

the vocabulary and norms of basic tradition.

In the UK and US, the positive value placed on the uniqueness of each immigrant culture leads to the traditional performing arts being well promoted. Government grants and funding organisations support institutions which maintain and disseminate them among second generation immigrants as well as members of the society at large. Immigrants, too, make an impact on the state of these arts when they organise festivals – such as Odissi 2000 in Washington D.C., or Bharatanatyam in the Diaspora in Chicago – and invite leading performers, scholars and critics from India as well as from other parts of the diaspora. The world of an art form like Bharatanatyam encompasses not only Chennai and Delhi, but Birmingham, Chicago, Texas and Perth.

These very factors also contribute to change. Promotion of multiculturalism means that grantors also favour projects involving collaboration with other immigrant groups. Performers are also invited to collaborate with mainstream culture, with modern dancers, symphony orchestras and theatre directors, opportunities which give them a wider audience, prestige and greater financial viability. The artistic and sociological effects of their interactive experiences resonate far beyond their local areas – as such work is presented at international festivals, sent on tour, and made available through video and audio recording. A collaborative work between a choreographer from Chennai and a modern dancer from Pittsburgh imprints itself on the mind of a dancer in Hyderabad; an interaction between a jazz guitarist and a *ghatam* player in London inspires a composer in Indianapolis.

While there are still those who cavil at such hybridisation, the trend

itself can only grow because in the end it reflects a cultural reality that is more pervasive—and persuasive—than any negative valuation of it. Members of the Indian diaspora today include many young people who feel like hybrids. Brought up in a non-Indian society which highlights their 'foreign-ness' they often revel in this dual identity. Britain's Akram Khan, for example, so successfully fuses a traditional form like Kathak with modern dance that his work is celebrated by the British government as being expressive of contemporary Britain. In the past an Indian had to choose between 'traditional' and 'modern', 'immigrant' and 'fully vested member of a society'. Today he or she can lay claim to both aspects of such dichotomies.

In keeping with the socio-economic tenor of our times, the performing arts in the diaspora are not solely dependant on government patronage either. Musicians have for quite some time been supported by recording contracts and concert fees. Now, as members of the diaspora grow more affluent, they themselves fund non-profit organisations to promote Indian performing arts. Tours of Indian artists are more often than not organised by Indian entrepreneurs who depend on ticket sales within the Indian community. Offerings include recitals by south Indian musicians, hit plays from Bombay and block-buster shows featuring Indian film stars.

As Indians enter the field of production, presentation, and patronage, they choose what aspects of Indian culture get disseminated and begin to have a hand in effecting the larger society's image of what it means to be 'Indian'.

For years, within the mainstream of western performing arts, India and things Indian were represented by choreographers, composers, play-

wrights and even performers who were not Indian. The music for a play like *Phaedra Britannica* set in India was written by an American; costumes for the *Mahabharata*, though inspired by Indian dress, were designed by an Anglo-Frenchwoman of Greek parentage. There were few professionals of Indian origin in theatre, music, or dance, in the same way that society at large contained a relatively insignificant number of Indians. Even when immigrant populations in the UK grew, they rarely attended performances; their children were by and large not encouraged to enter the field.

When someone of Indian origin was successful in the performing arts, 'Indian-ness' was seen to be incidental to his or her artistry, and only highlighted by other Indians, proud of such mainstream success. Zubin Mehta was first and foremost a leading conductor; only secondarily was he associated with—or representative of—India or things Indian. Even today, artists like the stellar counter-tenor Bejun Mehta, trained and brought up in North Carolina, are hardly thought of as 'Indian'. While this is in keeping with a general tendency towards 'colour-blindness' in the western performing arts, one which encourages directors and producers to give Indian artists non-specifically Indian roles—those of doctors or scientists, or even 'Romeo'—it also means that images of 'the Indian' gain no contours from such casting.

When people of Indian parentage design sets or costumes for the theatre or opera, they rarely look to India for inspiration, even in a milieu where it seemed for a while that the only costume choice for men was some version of the *sherwani* or *kurta pyjama*—in productions which ranged from a British *Richard II* to an American *Salome* (the opera). Things Indian

are, instead, part of an international grab-bag that can be turned to even if the production itself makes no reference to India. Their use in, say, film scores, pop music, or dance choreography dilutes, rather than highlights, their specific 'Indian-ness'.

On the other hand, when Indians are among those who produce and make artistic choices, they can begin to effect changes in the general public's perception of themselves. In a recent New York production of Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* by a South Asian company, India and Indians were represented by people familiar with the subtleties of the Indian context. Brought alive by an Indian director with an understanding of multilayered Indian society, the play became textured. Even minor characters were three dimensional. Thus the audience could identify with them and with their preoccupations—even if many of those were culturally specific.

With the growth of the Indian diaspora and consolidation of South Asian immigrant groups there are now several companies run by people of Indian origin whose efforts are changing the picture of what is 'Indian' in the performing arts—particularly when their work becomes part of the mainstream. Groups in England are invited to bring their productions—a *Cyrano* starring a well-known actor from India, a musical *Ramayana* from Birmingham, a modern play by an Indian playwright—to London's National Theatre. The success of such ventures, and of Indian popular culture abroad, leads to investment in expensive productions like *Bombay Dreams* which, even if it belongs to a western genre, employs Indian artists—composer, co-choreographer, script-writer, and most of the performers. The upcoming musical version of

Monsoon Wedding is to be directed by Mira Nair herself.

There is also – however slow – an emergence and growth in the numbers of Indian comedians, of Indian playwrights, modern dance choreographers and performance artists. Their ‘stories’ can be about being brought up Indian in a non-Indian world – about a mother who plies you with *chicken tikka masala* while urging you to marry a fellow Indian, or a boss who can’t pronounce your name let alone the name of the village you were born in. Or they may deal with recently formed cultural stereotypes as when Keith Khan and Ali Zaidi of the English company Moti Roti collaborate with an American director on the multimedia show, *Alladeen*, to tell the story of call operators in Bangalore.

Despite all this, South Asian artists in Britain and America will tell you that there is still a long way to go. Many are uncomfortable that images of what is Indian are still being decided by non-Indians. The poster for the Broadway *Bombay Dreams*, for example, features two young Indian models and not the actual stars of the show. Is this, they ask, because the two leads are considered talented enough to be flown to England to sing for the Queen, but aren’t thought to look ‘right’ enough to sell the show? Others would like to be free of labels and join the larger community of performers, have access to the larger body of work being done.

For the moment, however, the kinds of successes mentioned earlier are heady. They encourage more and more people to seek a career in the performance arts which in turn, leads to further ventures. Dance companies are being formed every year and recording albums being pressed. At this very moment in London a sitar concerto is being written. In Burbank California a TV sitcom centred round a South Asian family is being cast.

Through the looking glass

SANGEETA RAY

I WRITE this article with an overwhelming sense of looming disaster – I feel myself headed towards an unavoidable collision with a huge rock that I know I cannot avoid even as I can recognize and predict its trajectory. A diasporan academic writing about writers from the diaspora for a journal from India knows that she may be in for a helluva ride once the article is online for many to critique.

So why did I agree to set myself up for such a ride. I believe the answer may partly lie in my own desire to provide a much delayed answer to a question I was asked at a talk I gave in 1997 at Jadavpur University, Calcutta. The question went something like this: Why are you folks out there (in the US) so obsessed with diaspora, diaspora, diaspora? My initial answer was phrased as an abrasive, why not? After all these years and after reading and teaching many South Asian writers (mostly from the diaspora), I want to answer the question in a more sustained manner (though perhaps not any less abrasively). This self-analysis is of course highly self-conscious and partly self-serving since many diasporic academics suffer from what I only semi-facetiously term, the *kala*

pani anxiety. But on the other hand, when taking into account Indian writing in English, the diaspora figures quite prominently.

So my agreeing to write is many pronged; I can assert my home-grown identity while claiming diasporic expertise. I can finally answer the question asked of me back in India while sitting at my computer looking out at a snow covered yard trying to capture a hint of a long remembered warmth. I can single out all the writers I like and don't like and try to capture why diaspora writing evokes such strong emotions, often negative in so many Indians in India and abroad. In what follows I mostly talk about South Asian writing in North America which chiefly feature the novel. It would be an entirely different cricket game to engage with Indo-Caribbean or Indo-African writers (I have published on them elsewhere).

I want to say at the outset that I do not want to get into a battle over whether writers should be writing in English or in an Indian language; whether writing in English inevitably fails to capture the rhythms and cadences of something broadly yet essentially conceived of as an Indian life. Anyone who argues the latter has obviously never read Amit Chaudhuri. More on him later. More immediately and quite emphatically, I do not want to rehearse an argument over whether writing in English is better than or far superseded by writings in the many Indian vernaculars. For one, my vanity is much more circumscribed than Salman Rushdie's, and second – I say this because it is an unavoidable truth – I am incapable of reading writings in any vernacular. My knowledge of written Hindi is the best, which is to say I read Prem Chand while going to high school in Kanpur, India. My knowledge of Bengali, my mother tongue

is primarily oral. I learned to read only because like a true Bengali I learnt to sing Rabindra Sangeet while growing up in Bombay, Trivandrum and Kanpur.

My only true expertise in an Indian language is English – at Lady Brabourne College in Calcutta I was an English major and my language requirement was fulfilled by taking something absurdly called 'alternative English', and then I also took general English. There was nothing alternative or general about any of the English literature read in these classes; very much a repetition of the same canonical texts of British literature – from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf was my repertoire – and after a BA and MA in English I far surpassed a mere saturation point with the heavy hitters of a much endorsed British canon.

My entry into the field of post-colonial studies, in which diaspora writing from the subcontinent features quite significantly, happened towards the end of my PhD studies at the University of Washington in Seattle and like many other South Asian post-colonial critics working towards a degree in the late '80s early '90s in the US, I too was heavily influenced by colonial discourse analysis. My first book is pretty much part and parcel of the field of colonial discourse analysis with only a chapter devoted to two contemporary South Asian writers. But I was and continue to produce work on writers from the diaspora though it is in my teaching that I most frequently engage and confront South Asian writers from the diaspora.

I am not an expert on South Asia, my training is not as a comparatist – my interest lies in the literary (quite restricted to the anglophone world at large) broadly impacted by theoretical trends in the US academy – post-structuralism, postmarxism, cultural

studies, new historicism, transnational feminism and, most recently, ethics. I say all of the above to not just position myself but to also highlight the particular slant of my position vis-a-vis the subject matter of diaspora writings.

At a gut level I am absolutely amazed at the proliferation of writers emerging from South Asia, primarily from Indians in India and abroad. There are enough writers that Washington DC has been able to organise three conferences with a writing workshop hosted by a writer for three years now. The success of the workshops attest to the probable appearance of still more novels and short stories by a new generation of South Asian Americans. For the inaugural conference, the organization primarily made up of very young, energetic South Asian professionals, invited David Davdar, CEO and Publisher of Penguin Books India to talk about the industry's growing appetite for South Asian writing in English. Was it a surprise when he came up with his first novel in 2002 titled *The House of Blue Mangoes*? Of course not. It seems kind of fitting that the publisher of a house that has produced so many Indian writers from R.K. Narayan to Arundhati Roy should want to feel the urge to compose his version of the 'great Indian novel'.

An even greater illustration of the success of South Asian writers in the West maybe clicked on at www.shashitharoor.com. How appropriate that an Under-Secretary General of Communications and Public Information of the UN would feature a website about his writerly achievements, featuring among various books and photographic self-images a novel steeped in Hindu mythology titled *The Great Indian Novel*. While his reviews claim him to be a satiric novelist greatly con-

cerned with social ills, is it in bad taste for me to imagine a website with the url: www.greatindianwriter.com? If I was being truly honest, I would say this may be my own subconscious fantasy.

The conundrum faced by diasporan academics now is not where we are going to find a writer to read/teach but who are we going to teach/read/write about. The choices are varied and while most are written by Indians, Indians in the US or Indian Americans there are writers from Canada as well – novelists like Shyam Selvaduram of *Funny Boy* notoriety – a queer bildungsroman about a gay boy discovering his sexuality even as Sri Lanka is ripped apart by ethnic violence. A bildungsroman that ends not with marriage or the birth of a child but with the by now familiar trope of migration to the West.

I must include here a book that I just taught last summer by Indo-Canadian writer Anita Rau Badami, *The Hero's Walk*, an evocative novel of inertia and failed mobility, migration and reverse migration. A beautifully narrated novel, poignant and humorous about a Vancouver born, orphaned inter-racial girl, traumatized into silence being raised by her grandparents in a small town in India. A novel that suggests the vast untapped material still available for depiction; a novel remarkable in its ability to make heroic the ordinariness of everyday life. It reminds us that not all novels have to be about the partition of India, or the problems of assimilation, or the trials between mother and daughter, or the oppressed lives of women who find a hard won freedom once they come to the West.

While all these subjects are crucial and continue to haunt and obsess us, I know, at least for now, I don't want to read another novel by any

ethnic minority that explores through the lens of gender a generational and cultural gap. While I find myself defending writings from the diaspora to Indians in India and have no truck with notions of authenticity and can't tolerate essentialism when it comes to imaginative renditions of lives and characters, I do feel that certain topics have reached a soaking point producing cripplingly unimaginative work. At the same time as a diasporic Indian I feel I should not have to explain myself, or even worse shrilly defend my cautious admiration of works like *Jasmine* (see below) and Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

So in general I prefer having an increasing pool of writers and texts to choose from rather than the stalwarts, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K Narayan; the familiar Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul; the staples Kamala Markandaya (*Nectar in a Sieve* – perhaps the only one in print), Anita Desai and perhaps Shashi Deshpande and Bapsi Sidhwani. I can now teach a course on just South Asian Writing in English moving chronologically and thematically from Raja Raot Ameena Meer (*Bombay Talkie*), or Shauna Singh Baldwin (*English Lessons and Other Stories; What the Body Remembers*) or Anjana Appachanna (*Incantations and Other Stories; Listening Now*).

Even more incredible is the fact that I can teach (and write), if I choose to, only on South Asian women's writing and include writers not just from North America but from Australia, the Caribbean and Africa.

However, this celebratory proliferation has produced works that sometimes have little merit. It's a delicate balancing act because while one enjoys the current currency of South Asia, particularly India, in the US imagination, one balks at the continu-

ing exoticization and commodification of both writers and other worlds. Colonial othering has been replaced or even displaced by neo-imperial forms of longing, lamentation, bewilderment, benevolence and malevolence towards the other. These feelings are fuelled and altered by increased globalization and panic at the visibility and ease with which the other appears to profit from its very otherness while participating in the practices of an everyday life in what should be for the other anything but ordinary.

Heterotopia is what sells in a capitalist world and the success of novels creating unfamiliar worlds testifies to the reader's capitulation to estrangement and the processes of defamilialization. One could argue that this is true of most novels; that in fact the novel form excels at capturing the familiar and the strange and that the best novels are those that can retain our attention precisely because they are able to maintain the fine line between absolute alienation and repetitive familiarity. So what is different in a diasporic South Asian novel? The difference lies I would argue in the reader's response to the constructed dialogism within the novel. In other words, if we were to put Iser (reader response) and Bakhtin (theory of the novel) in conversation over the form, function and mastery of the South Asian, diasporic, anglophone novel it would require a re-evaluation of some of their crucial ideological assumptions. But I need to leave that for another time and another place.

For now I want to go back to the question about the diaspora's obsession with the diaspora. The apparent digression that follows is actually not a self indulgent foray into an evaluation of the social-psyché of an exilic population, it is rather a necessary aside since so many novels deal pre-

cisely with the very same anxieties and concerns. It's a commonplace now that newer diasporas (I am talking here chiefly about South Asian migration to North America and I call it newer as opposed to other Asian migration – primarily Chinese, Japanese and Korean) are more concerned with trying to maintain umbilical ties with home/desh even as the manner in which these ties manifest themselves vary generationally. A post '65 migrating generation imagines India very differently than say a post '80s generation and a post 2000 generation. Class and gender play crucial roles in the fashioning of not just the diaspora but also the diaspora's interaction with and investment in cultures that define an ethics of ethnicity.

To generalize, one could say without much qualification that an earlier generation felt greatly unmoored and anchored themselves by holding on to an ethos characterized as, say Indian, evoking tradition as a key that helped them expand and share a common idea of home with other similar minded folks even as it helped keep at bay the immanent threat of an invading foreign public sphere. The separation of public and private so crucial to colonialism and nationalism (see Partha Chatterjee's work or any number of critics working in related fields including myself) resurfaces in the US, Canada, England, Australia as a way of marking difference.

We are here but not quite. We want to be home but not yet and so we continue to recreate home as a desire to reconstitute the discourses of us versus them. The us has a cultural superiority rooted in ideas of tradition and community that confirms some of the fundamental tenets of an orientalist discourse. It is an anxious withholding of modernity in the face of a material modernity so desired by the

us. The rituals of custom are furiously and often desperately maintained so that the us does not get swallowed up by the them who are merely dedicated to an ever developing materialist modernity.

In contrast, newer generations growing up in a much more hybrid world, a postmodern, globalized, digital, consumer capitalist world has less trouble negotiating the us and them divide. And again class is a crucial marker of cosmopolitan ability – to be at home anywhere and everywhere. I call this cosmopolitics and not cosmopolitanism because the cosmopolitan while sharing non-nationalist ideals with the cosmopolitan enjoys the idea of home and this enjoyment while not entirely independent of gender is far more androgynous than ever imagined by an earlier migrating population. (An interesting exploration of this more hybrid moment can be found in a memoir like text, Mira Kamdar's *Motiba's Tatoos*, a far less self-indulgent memoir than Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines*).

Then there is the second generation of South Asian Americans – the unforgiving acronym of ABCD (American Born Confused Desis) only touches the tip of the cultural iceberg they are challenged to confront and negotiate. All this and more forms the content of many novels originating in the diaspora though the quintessential ABCD dilemma seems to me at least in the US, for now, more the domain of films.

Short stories seem best suited for the exploration of both first and second generation angst. I am thinking here of collections like Chitra Devakaruni's *Arranged Marriages* and Jhumpa Lahiri's Booker prize winning *Interpreter of Maladies* that represent various moments in the life of an immigrant generation in expres-

sive, though not necessarily always impressive, vignettes. In a full length novel version we get such desperate evocations like Bharati Kirchner's *Sharmila's Book*, a novel of only slightly more merit than the kind of torpid colonial romances produced by the likes of M.K. Fisher (Kirchner should stick to writing recipes – they actually work). Bharati Mukherjee's early novel *Jasmine*, despite all its problems, still remains one of my favourites because it attempts to, in part at least, rewrite the frontier novel from the perspective of a female immigrant traversing the vast spaces of an alien territory.

The novel, unlike most, attempts a formal innovation still very much in the vanguard when it comes to South Asian anglophone writing. While it reaffirms everything unoriginal about the myth of American individualism and mobility, it does so by producing a chronotope that is quite brilliant in its execution. I would argue that the same is true in *Holder of the World*, another novel, which, while it leaves me incredulous vis-a-vis its exoticization, I feel compelled to praise for its polemical re-narrativization of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. While it may imagine the Raj in familiar language, it absolutely defamiliarizes a whole range of British and Puritan images and ideas.

In terms again of execution, in the trope of time travel via a computer grid rather than a Wellsian time machine, in its rewriting of a premier American novel, and in its tongue-in-cheek metafictional commentary ('Who can blame Nathaniel Hawthorne for shying away from the real story of the brave Salem mother and her illegitimate daughter', 284) it far surpasses the banal, failed serio-comic novel by Hari Kunzru titled *The Impressionist*. Perhaps my biases are

obvious but I remain a literary reader and so find solace in aesthetics when troubled by unpalatable politics and/or ethics. And so I remain a fan of Rushdie with *Ground Beneath My Feet* being my favourite. I could write volumes on just this one novel but since so much has been written on Rushdie I will bypass him to talk briefly about other novels.

I could also include here a evaluation of *The God of Small Things*, not a novel by a diasporic writer, but a novel that was just such a pleasurable and moving read. Despite straining at times at a forced erudition the novel opened up a new vista in terms of form and language. The thirty or so opening pages of the novel tells you most everything that is going to unfurl and the great success of the novel lies in its ability to hold the reader's attention despite its beginning that encapsulates the middle and the end. The novel ends on the hopeful note of tomorrow for characters who we know are dead but as the description of the kathakali dance expresses, the novel gathers its stature not from the story but from the telling of the tale, a common tale, a known tale, a tale that one can enter and leave at any point. A remarkable feat for a novice writer and perhaps a one hit wonder. But I know I'll buy the next book Roy writes, if she writes fiction and not political essays.

I keep wanting to wrap up and mention some other writers in broad strokes but I keep having to pause and talk about one more favourite writer. So this is my final, though not unrelated digression. I want to return to Amit Chaudhuri as an example of another writer, very different from Rushdie and Roy who in many ways bucks the trend of common diasporic themes, perhaps because he is not truly a man of the diaspora – more a peripatetic writer with a stable address

in Calcutta (?). A modernist to the core, his novellas and novel are ruminations on subjective states evoked by the most banal of moments such as the daily evening sweeping of the floor in dusty Calcutta by a woman called Chaya; or vivid, sensual, ineffable yet expressive descriptions of the eating of boal fish with one's hands or the soggy towels hanging from a clothes line in mid-afternoon on Vidyasagar Road. His three novellas gathered together under the cover of *Freedom Song* are refreshing, calming, deeply evocative meanderings that inspire me to believe in the Kantian aesthetics of the beautiful.

Rather than being borne away in a rush of events, Chaudhuri's craftsmanship makes a virtue of belatedness including in his narrative, a metafictional commentary about his own art: '...why did these houses seem to suggest that an infinitely interesting story might be written around them? And yet the story would never be a satisfying one, because the writer, like Sandeep, would be too caught up jotting down irrelevances and digressions that make up lives, and the life of a city, rather than a good story – till the reader would shout "Come to the point!" – and there would be no point, except the girl memorising the rules of grammar, the old man in the easy-chair fanning himself, and the house with the small empty porch that was crowded, paradoxically, with many memories and possibilities. The "real" story, with its beginning, middle, and conclusion, would never be told, because it did not exist' (*Freedom Song*, 54).

But for the most part, the 'real story' does exist for most writers inhabiting the diaspora and most novels coming out of a South Asian/diasporic-realism in a myriad of ways. One can get the somewhat

straightforward mirroring of a Victorian novel in the likes of *A Suitable Boy* (Vikram Seth), a novel that can do justice to a Lukacsian confirmation of realism as that which – 'represents reality as it is – namely, as a totality.' Or on the other hand one can get the equally unwieldy though, for me, the peculiarly productive and chaotic beauty of *A Glass Palace* (Amitava Ghosh) that takes the Lukacsian idea of 'reification' and turns it on its head as it were by aestheticizing it via the modes deemed more representative of modernism and expressionism.

Ghosh among others could very well be termed 'critical realists' in the vein of Lukacs' heroes like Scott, Balzac and Mann. But Ghosh's critical realism actually points to the impossibility of reflecting the totality of social relationships in colonial, imperial and neo-imperial worlds captured in the sweeping yet fragmented colonial map that precedes the table of contents and the panoramic views frequently clipped by concentrated descriptions of peoples and places forming a montage of sense impressions and fragmentary subjective states often deemed alien to realism.

So while the kind of postmodern experimentation of a Rushdie remains unrepresentative of South Asian writing in general and realism seems increasingly the form of choice, in some of the best novels it is a realism sundered from an uncomplicated mimesis. Realism achieves the kind of social totality in these novels that cannot be explicated by the logics of a horizontal axis confounded by its intersection with a vertical one. To me formal realism in South Asian writing is best captured by the description of maps of the world provided by the unnamed narrator of another one of Ghosh's novels *Shadow Lines*. Using a compass, the narrator draws three

circles with different cities at the centre and circumference. What he realizes is what we in the diaspora coming out of another culture and inhabiting a different one often feel – a vertiginous disassociation best captured in the following lines from the novel. While these lines address a specific moment of recognition for the narrator vis-a-vis his cousin and family, I am using it here symptomatically:

'When I turned back to my first circle I was struck with wonder that there had really been a time, not so long ago, when people, sensible people, of good intention, had thought that all maps were the same, that there was a special enchantment in lines... They had drawn their borders, believing in their pattern, in the enchantment of lines... What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet undiscovered irony...: the simple fact that there had never been a moment ...when places were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines... a moment when each city [substitute place, my words] was the inverted image of the other; locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking glass border' (233).

So much of South Asian diasporic writing inhabits this looking glass border, a looking glass that very rarely reflects what we hope to see – it is not just a fractured mirror, a refracting mirror or an opaque one. More often the mirror shatters into shards forcing us to piece them together for some semblance of a composed subjectivity but very often composure is exactly what is denied or when attained it often seems temporary, belated and fraught. I do not mourn this loss of composure since I find the virtue overrated. I thrive on the mobility gained by being able to traverse the inside/

outside opposition in both antipodean spaces. I am more at home here than I can be there, but I was more at home there than when I first got here. I am lucky to have had a home then and now.

Some may be at home nowhere – a young girl growing up in rural Bangladesh, married off to an older man in London to inhabit a small, cramped council apartment on Brick Lane serving time as wife, mother and garment worker. Her only voyage out is through letters that arrive intermittently from her sister left behind who ironically travels greater distances literally and metaphorically and ultimately disappears from the pages of the novel, *Brick Lane*, in which she appears in/as scripted ungrammatical English that translates an informal, colloquial, vernacular grammar. As the one sister refuses to participate in the longing for home that paralyzes her husband, refusing to return 'home' with her husband, it is the husband's voice that emerges from the great divide (a different modality of the us and them binary) in the final pages of the novel usurping the epistolary presence of the sister whose disappearance from the pages of the novel marks a more dangerous invisibility in Dhaka.

The narrator of *Brick Lane* depicts worlds (in England and Bangladesh) absolutely unfamiliar to me but the triumph of the novel, and indeed all great books, is that by the time I reach the last page of the novel I can simultaneously mourn the loss of another unaccounted for woman who breathed life into the pages of her sister's book and marvel at the enormous capacity for life in the figure of Nazneen, the sister in *Brick Lane*, as she finally ties on her boots and gets ready to skate on ice in a sari in London.

Washington's new strategic partnership

ROBERT M. HATHAWAY

A DOZEN years ago, *India Abroad* publisher Gopal Raju sought out Rep. Stephen Solarz for advice on how the Indian-American community might increase its political clout in Washington. Hire an Indian-American who has interned in the US Congress, counselled Solarz, widely regarded as India's best friend and most forceful advocate on Capitol Hill. When, after a fruitless search, Raju reported that no such person could be found, Solarz then recommended that Raju hire someone from AIPAC—the legendary American Israel Public Affairs Committee, reputed to have some of the most impressive political muscle in Washington. Out of that casual conversation, and others like it, has evolved one of the most interesting partnerships in US politics today – the new collaboration between the Indian-American and Jewish communities.

The new ties between Indian-Americans and Jewish-Americans parallel the dramatic turnaround in recent years in relations between

India and Israel. Burdened by distrust throughout the heyday of India's obsession with non-alignment, the two countries established full diplomatic links only in 1992. Since the installation of a BJP government in New Delhi in 1998, ties between the two—centering on shared security interests, arms sales, and intelligence cooperation – have kicked into high gear. Israel is already New Delhi's second most important source of arms and military technology after Russia, and the projected sales of the Phalcon early-warning radar and, possibly, the Arrow missile defence system will further solidify the arms relationship. Facing a common foe in Islamic extremism, the intelligence services of the two countries have also fashioned a thriving if largely clandestine partnership.

Some officials and commentators have envisioned adding a third party, the United States, to this emerging Indo-Israeli partnership. Speaking in Washington at the annual dinner of the American Jewish Committee

(AJC) last May, Brajesh Mishra, Prime Minister Vajpayee's national security advisor, underscored the 'fundamental similarities' linking the three countries. 'We are all democracies, sharing a common vision of pluralism, tolerance and equal opportunity.' Beyond that, he added, all three were uniquely confronted by the scourge of terrorism. As 'the main targets of international terrorism,' Mishra told his appreciative audience, 'democratic countries should form a viable alliance against terrorism.'

L.K. Advani, the deputy prime minister, has also urged the creation of this three-cornered partnership. Increasingly, one hears Israeli leaders and American politicians pushing this course as well. Nor is it coincidental that many of India's best friends in the US Congress are Jewish. Jewish members of the House of Representatives are nearly twice as likely to join the Indian caucus as their non-Jewish colleagues.

It was not mere happenstance that led Mishra to speak before the American Jewish Committee last May. Increasingly, senior Indian leaders meet with American Jewish groups whenever they visit the United States. Vajpayee himself found time for representatives of five influential Jewish groups, including AIPAC, the AJC, and the Anti-Defamation League, when he attended the UN General Assembly meeting in New York in September 2002.

The manner in which the announcement of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to India last September was made also illustrates this new constellation of forces in American politics. As the first ever official trip to India by an Israeli prime minister, news of the proposed visit was of considerable interest in both India and Israel. And where was the announcement of the upcoming visit first made?

In neither New Delhi nor Tel Aviv, but at a private dinner in Washington hosted by the AJC.

Reflecting the new warmth in relations between the two communities, India's ambassador in Washington has hosted Hanukkah celebrations at his residence each of the past two years, complete with candles, prayers, and a skit about the Jewish holiday performed by children from a local Jewish elementary school. The event last December was attended by over 250 American Jews, as well as a handful of Indian-American Jews.

Indian-Americans have long sought a voice in the US political arena commensurate with their economic and professional attainments, but only within the past decade has the community begun to command a respectful attention from US politicians. Even now, however, it remains an immature and politically unsophisticated grouping riven by personal rivalries and competing organizations, each jockeying for access and influence with American policymakers frequently focused more on financial contributions to their political war chests than on issues of concern to the community. Indeed, Vajpayee has complained, only half-jokingly, that there are more Indian organizations in the United States than there are Indian-Americans.

Leaders in the Indian-American community have recognized for many years that they could learn much about using the US political system effectively from the Jewish community. But until rather recently, talk along these lines had not been followed with action. The US India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) is widely credited with a leading role in deliberately reaching out to American Jews for the purpose of promoting a sustained partnership. Created in 2002 by Sanjay Puri, an IT entrepreneur in the

Virginia suburbs outside Washington, USINPAC is a bipartisan organization whose stated mission is to strengthen bilateral security and economic ties between India and the United States and to help shape US policy on issues of concern to the Indian-American community.

In the two years of its existence, USINPAC has been remarkably successful in establishing a presence on Capitol Hill and in forging friendships with key US legislators, including Republican Orrin Hatch, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Republican Charles Grassley, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Republican Richard Lugar, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Democrat Joseph Biden, former chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Democrat Tom Lantos, the ranking minority member of the House International Relations Committee. Puri currently serves as the organization's executive director.

USINPAC has worked closely with a variety of Jewish groups to promote ties between Indian-Americans and US Jews. Last July, USINPAC, AIPAC, and the AJC hosted a joint reception for US lawmakers on Capitol Hill. Marvelling at the impressive number of legislators in attendance, one Indian-American complacently congratulated a community colleague. 'Don't kid yourself,' the latter replied; 'they're not here because of us.'

In another joint endeavour, AJC and USINPAC presented a memorial plaque to the American space agency NASA to commemorate last year's Columbia space shuttle tragedy, in which an Israeli astronaut and an Indian-American scientist perished. USINPAC also collaborated with the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) last summer to organize a conference in Washington on ter-

rorism in India. As USINPAC's Puri puts it, there's a 'natural fit' between the Indian-American and the Jewish communities. They share common values and a commitment to democracy, capitalism and free markets. Notwithstanding their successes, both are still somewhat outsiders in the larger American society. And both are victims of terrorism.

By all accounts, the AJC, one of the largest and most influential Jewish organizations in the United States, spearheads the new Jewish interest in reaching out to Indian-Americans. The AJC has sponsored trips to Israel by Indian-American community leaders, and organized more than half a dozen trips to India for prominent US Jews. Jewish leaders who visit India are accorded meetings with many of New Delhi's most senior officials. During a visit last year, AJC president Harold Tanner met with President Kalam, Deputy Prime Minister Advani, Mishra, and other Cabinet ministers. AJC leaders have also been invited to speak at the biennial convention of the National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA), and AJC position papers are circulated to convention delegates. A few months ago the AJC opened an office in New Delhi.

Pursuing a somewhat different tack, JINSA has been particularly active in working to foster trilateral cooperation among India, Israel and the United States. In early 2003, JINSA organized a conference in New Delhi on national security, intelligence, and counterterrorism. Among the conference speakers were retired FBI and CIA counterterrorism experts, the former head of Mossad (the Israeli foreign intelligence service), and a former Israel Defence Force deputy chief of staff. 'Hundreds' of past and present Indian security and intelli-

gence officers attended, one of the conference organizers later reported.

According to this source, the Indian foreign ministry fought hard to quash plans for the event, but ultimately failed because the conference enjoyed the backing of senior BJP politicians. JINSA officials met with both Advani and Kalam for tea and conversation at the conclusion of the conference. A follow-on trilateral conference was held in Herzliya, Israel earlier this year. The statement issued at the conclusion of the 2004 event applauded 'the growing interactions between Indian and Jewish communities and their respective organizations' in the United States and praised this cooperation as an 'effective vehicle for the promotion of interests and values common to all three' countries.

In one of the more interesting manifestations of this new collaboration, Indian-American groups have invited Jewish organizations to give seminars to community leaders on lobbying Congress and other means of maximizing their political effectiveness. One of the first of these training sessions took place in October 2002, when the AJC and the Indian American Center for Political Awareness invited representatives from the two communities to AJC national headquarters in New York to discuss the nitty-gritty of political mobilization.

Topics reviewed in this and similar gatherings included coalition building; communication with membership; working across party lines; the key role of congressional staff; and organizing at the grassroots level. In these training sessions Jewish representatives frequently note that they, like the Indians, are a fragmented community, and emphasize the importance of overcoming internal divisions before seeking political support beyond the community.

Kumar P. Barve, the majority leader in the state assembly of Maryland and the highest elected Indian-American official in the United States, explained the logic behind these activities in an interview with the *Washington Post* last year. 'Indian Americans see the American Jewish community as a yardstick against which to compare themselves. It's seen as the gold standard in terms of political activism.' Kapil Sharma, a young Indian-American activist who works with the Indian American Center for Political Awareness, puts it another way. Jewish groups, he explains, are educating Indian-Americans on the techniques of 'political empowerment'. Or as USINPAC's Puri succinctly says, 'It's pointless to reinvent the wheel.'

One of the techniques of political empowerment that Indian-American organizations have borrowed from their Jewish allies is a systematic programme to place young interns, usually college students, in congressional offices on Capitol Hill. These young people are exposed to the American political system, make potentially valuable contacts, and get a first-hand introduction to how the system works—and how it can be used to address the needs of outside groups. Occasionally these young people return to Washington after graduation to assume full-time positions as legislative aides, where they can act as a channel of communication between the community and members of Congress. The idea for this internship programme came directly from AIPAC; indeed, Ralph Nurnberger, who set up the largest and most successful programme for Indian-American interns, cut his political teeth working for AIPAC.

Since 11 September 2001, Indian-Americans and US Jews have been

linked most forcefully by the need to make common cause against terrorism and Islamic extremism. Tom Lantos, a senior Democrat in the House of Representatives, a Holocaust survivor, and an ardent friend of Israel, has declared that the two communities 'have been drawn together by our joint fight against mindless, vicious, fanatic Islamic terrorism.' No three countries in the world better understand the nature of the global terrorist threat than India, Israel, and the United States, AJC executive director David Harris told the NFIA convention a year after the 9/11 terror attacks. 'And no three countries are doing more to stand firm and resolute, not to bend, not to break, before the violence and intimidation.' In a tactic not uncommon on these occasions, Harris then followed these observations by turning to the neuralgic issue of Pakistan, which, he asserted, must not be allowed 'to have it both ways' by supporting cross-border terrorism while simultaneously claiming membership in the community of civilized nations.

Reflecting this perception of shared security interests and a common adversary, lobbyists from the two communities have worked together to shape legislation coming out of the Congress. Last summer, for instance, representatives from the two communities – some sporting lapel pins featuring an American flag flanked by the flags of Israel and India – joined forces to secure adoption in the House of Representatives of a provision requiring, as a condition of US aid to Pakistan, an annual presidential report on Pakistani support for anti-India insurgents in Kashmir and Pakistani activities bearing on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The two groups have also combined to lobby the Bush administration on behalf of an Israeli sale to

India of Phalcon early-warning radar technology.

Some of those active in this collaboration argue that because both communities are highly educated, affluent and disproportionately represented in certain professions such as medicine, engineering, education and high-tech, they share tangible interests that extended beyond opposition to Islamic radicalism. Ralph Nurnberger, the former AIPAC lobbyist who is now associated with the Indian American Center for Political Awareness, insists 'it is more than just Muslim extremism. It is the same basic issues that both [communities] face. Discrimination, hate crime legislation, immigration legislation, education policies, as well as so many social issues that are domestic in this country.'

Indeed, in the anxious weeks immediately after the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a venerable Jewish organization dedicated to opposing not just anti-Semitism but discrimination in all its manifestations, reached out to the Sikh community, several of whose members had been the victims of attacks by incensed if poorly informed Americans who believed that the Sikh turban signified the wearer was a Muslim. Racial profiling, which resulted in Indians being pulled off airliners because US inspectors thought they looked 'Middle Eastern', provided another arena where the ADL and other Jewish organizations shared valuable experience. The two communities also worked together during the 2002 elections to defeat Georgia Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, who was viewed as openly hostile to both India and Israel.

These examples of collaboration on domestic issues notwithstanding, terrorism and the need to oppose

Islamic violence is the glue binding this partnership. The shock occasioned by the 9/11 attacks first drove the two groups together, and the shared conviction that both communities, and their respective ancestral homelands, confront a common mortal threat provides the incentive for continued cooperation – that and, as one Jewish leader concedes, the need to ensure that America's own commitment to fighting terrorism does not slacken.

Some activists in both communities – few are eager to go on record – worry that USINPAC and, by extension, the Indian-American community have allied themselves too closely with the American political right wing and/or the Republican Party. They cite, for instance, the distinctively hawkish cast to the speakers at a USINPAC-organized conference in Washington last summer on terrorism in India – Frank Gaffney, president of the hardline Center for Security Policy and a former Ronald Reagan appointee; Thomas Neumann, executive director of the equally tough-minded JNSA, whose roster of political friends reads like a *Who's Who* among US conservatives; and Thomas Donnelly, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Washington's most influential conservative think tank and a way station for past and future officials of the Bush administration. Arnaud de Borchgrave, former editor-in-chief of the ultra-conservative *Washington Times*, has also spoken at USINPAC events. A right-wing patina might be useful in today's Washington, one Jewish leader warns, but could be a long-term liability. Yet, as Puri disarmingly explains, these are the people who have access to key decision-makers in the current US administration.

Others in the community have voiced concern that USINPAC is affiliated too closely with the Indian embassy in Washington, with the current government in New Delhi or, more generally, with the BJP. The BJP of Advani if not of Vajpayee is deeply distrusted among US India-watchers, and a repetition of the violence in Gujarat two years ago could tar Indian-Americans viewed as BJP sympathizers. Yet, these connections with Indian officialdom are undoubtedly a reflection of the prevailing pro-BJP sentiment within the entrepreneurial-oriented Indian-American community.

Skeptics see this new partnership between Indian-Americans and Jews as nothing more than a cynical marriage of convenience built on the 'lowest common denominator' of anti-Muslim sentiment and anxiety over terrorism. This, however, misses the conviction found in representatives from both communities that each is strengthened by working with the other, and moreover, that such an alliance serves to promote both American interests and universal values such as democracy and freedom.

Still, at the moment anyway, this is something of a one-sided partnership. Indian-Americans get more from the relationship, and value it more highly, than the Jewish community. In sharp contrast to the recent practice of Indian leaders, Israeli officials visiting New York or Washington do not yet routinely meet with Indian-American groups. When asked why he valued the partnership, one Jewish leader referred to a joke circulating among American Jews that together, Hindus and Jews make up one-fifth of humanity. In other words, Israel may find India a useful partner on the international scene, even if at the moment most of the domestic benefits of the

new collaboration flow to the Indian-American community.

But an identity of interests is not ensured even in the global arena. New Delhi will, of necessity, continue to temper its commitment to a full-fledged, across-the-board alliance with Israel out of a desire not to sever completely its ties to Arab countries. India, moreover, enjoys a close relationship with the resolutely anti-Israeli government of Iran. An occasional Indian display of sympathy for Palestinian grievances, or a refusal to back Israel under all circumstances may well create disgruntlement among American Jews, who may be tempted to conclude that their new Indian-American friends are not reliable allies.

Perhaps more significantly, the emerging partnership between the two US communities threatens to enlarge the already significant divisions within the Indian-American community. This embrace of American Jews and of Israel may be widely applauded among Indian-Americans who are Hindu, but Indian-American Muslims as well as many Sikhs find it disturbing if not deplorable. As one Jewish leader confessed, this is less a partnership between the Indian-American and the Jewish communities than a Hindu-Jewish alliance.

Within the Jewish community, the AJC has a history of reaching out to Indian Muslims in the United States, and AJC leaders have been stung by the sharp complaints of Indian Muslims about a relationship that, in their eyes, seems aggressively anti-Muslim. These fissures within the broader Indian-American community would exist even in the absence of any collaboration between Indian-Americans and American Jews, but the greatly expanded cooperation between the two communities since 9/11 has aggravated old wounds.

Pakistani-Americans have also been angered by this new alliance, viewing it as directed specifically against Pakistan. Resentment of this sort may serve to perpetuate old antagonisms and make more problematic cooperation between Pakistani- and Indian-Americans, who at least in the domestic arena have similar interests, and who would find it mutually advantageous to submerge ancestral feuds in the face of common problems.

At the end of the day, American Jews exercise political clout because most non-Jewish Americans have come to believe that their Jewish neighbours share their basic values and beliefs. This is not to say that the affluence of the Jewish community is not an important political asset, but all the money in the world would not buy American Jews their political muscle unless other Americans had a high level of comfort with the exercise of this muscle.

Furthermore, the majority of non-Jews in America, and their elected leaders in Washington, are convinced that close ties between the United States and Israel further American national interests. Political dexterity, skillful leadership, and ample money are necessary but not sufficient explanations for the remarkable successes American Jews have encountered in the US political arena over the past several generations. Instead, it is these beliefs on the part of non-Jewish America that account for the influence wielded by the Jewish community.

By the same token, Indian-Americans will flourish in US politics only to the extent that the larger American body politic continues to believe that India remains an attractive partner for the United States. And only so long as Indian-Americans are seen as Americans first, and only then as Indian-Americans.

Living the American dream

MARINA BUDHOS

I AM sitting in a café in Jackson Heights with Partha Bannerjee eating a quick dal and roti lunch. Jackson Heights, New York is called Little India, a wedge of narrow streets in Queens, elevated train tracks slashing a dark shadow over the Indian grocers, video and CD, sari and jewellery shops.

This is not the Little India of engineers and doctors comfortably settled in the suburbs of New Jersey, where I now live. This is the neighbourhood of cab drivers and security guards, doormen and dishwashers, of Bangladeshis and Nepalis, alongside Pakistanis and Indians, many of them undocumented.

I was born a few blocks away from here and at the time there were certainly no Indians. My parents, as a mixed couple, had a hard time finding a place until a nice Columbian couple rented the second floor apartment in their two-family house. When I was growing up, Queens was the borough of postwar American assimilation; where schoolteachers and electricians bought their first homes or comfortable apartments, and sent their chil-

dren to the local public schools. In the decades since, Queens has become a third world capital. The Number 7 line, which rattles across on the overhead track, passes neighbourhoods that lie cheek by jowl – Dominicans, Greeks, Mexicans, Vietnamese.

Today, Bannerjee looks exhausted. Bannerjee is director of the New Immigrant Empowerment Project, a non-profit that runs out of a tiny storefront on a basement floor office. Since 9/11 this South Asian immigrant community has been virtually shattered. ‘We’re in crisis all the time,’ he explains, handling calls from families – from incidents of harassment to loss of jobs to detainment and deportation.

Shortly after 9/11, the Bush Administration began a programme of special registration: all men, eighteen years and older, from Muslim countries, were required to register. The programme, which was begun under the newly created department of Homeland Security, was billed as an anti-terrorism measure. In fact, it became an unwieldy dragnet that snagged hundreds of thousands of bewildered immigrants into the bureaucratic

net of deportation. Many men were detained, questioned, or the process of deportation begun, usually for minor infractions such as forgetting to notify the authorities when they changed an address, or a misfiled application. Homeland Security, which was now amplified with FBI agents, began knocking on doors, pulling suspected illegal immigrants from their jobs for questioning.

Terror swept through the community – some fled to Canada, in hope of getting asylum, until it too closed its doors. Some simply packed up and went home. Others decided to lay low and not register at all. One year later, after a great deal of negative publicity and protest, the special registration programme was ended. By all accounts, it was a disaster. No terrorists were found. Lives were disrupted. The immigration department was flooded with thousands of deportation cases. Ironically, it was those who chose to stay in the shady margins – working off the books jobs – were essentially rewarded for not coming forward. And more importantly, civil liberties were deeply eroded.

In that same year Bush proposed a sweeping immigration plan that would allow America's roughly ten million illegal immigrants to apply for permanent status. Politically, no one was happy: those on the left complained the proposal didn't go far enough; the right immediately protested that this was a programme of asylum, which they strongly oppose.

Here in Jackson Heights, people threw parties. The Indian language papers fanned the flames of jubilation. As it turned out, the proposal was a limited one – illegal immigrants could apply for residency through their employers, renewing their status every three years, the possibility of citizenship left vague. For the dishwasher

who works off the books or the man who sells nuts on a street corner in Manhattan, such a sponsorship was highly unlikely to help. As the Presidential election year began, it became clear that the immigration plan was sunk anyway – too hot an issue for the administration to try to push through. Depression set in on the streets of Jackson Heights. The community grimly braced itself for yet another long siege. Many simply gave up on the America dream.

The special registration programme and the immigration proposal are remarkable, for they come from an administration that is willing to violate the civil liberties of immigrants in the name of security and yet proposes sweeping immigration changes that will potentially admit millions of illegal migrants. These seemingly contradictory moves show that there are really two Americas: America the immigrant nation, becoming evermore global within its borders, and America the global superpower, engaged in a war of terror.

In the US, we are living in the 'India' moment. Everywhere you turn, there's another article about either successful Indian immigrants who have found the American dream, Bollywood film festivals, or the rise of high-tech economic India, and the loss of American jobs to outsourcing. India – and South Asia – has never before made such an impression on the American psyche.

The success stories are certainly true. The Indian population in the US is among the most educated and well-paid in the nation; their per capita income exceeds that of native whites. Indian engineers and scientists were a major force in the high-tech Silicon Valley revolution years ago. And the second generation is filling America's colleges and graduate schools. I'll

never forget, when on book tour a few years ago visiting many of the Ivy Leagues, I realized how many of the students were South Asian. Walking through the halls of Cornell, where I had gone as an undergraduate, I noticed flyers for the student elections, and most of the names were Indian. Even here in the comfortable suburbs of New Jersey, Indians have begun running for local office. The sense of Indian arrival is very real.

But rather than being self-congratulatory, it's important to remember that US immigration policy has always been a mix of ideals and carefully engineered social policy according to our labour needs. At the turn of the century, when immigrants began to pour in from eastern and southern Europe, they were largely poor labourers, recruited to work the factories. In 1965, when immigration was again opened up to people of more varied national origin, it was to recruit highly trained professionals – especially doctors and engineers, which resulted in the 'brain drain' in India. This again, reflected the economic needs of a nation that was shifting out of an industrial-based economy.

The nineties presents a far more varied portrait for Indian and South Asian immigration – and for immigrants in general. On the one hand, there were the software engineers who surged to America under H-1B visas enjoying, for a while, lucrative work. Only a small percentage, however, were able to convert their status to any kind of permanent residency. The H1-B visas were designed to fill a labour niche: high-tech companies desperate for programmers and engineers during a boom time. These visas had little to do with immigration or citizenship.

At the same time, the nineties was also a time of working class immigr-

tion. With the US economy expanding, there was a desperate need for people to work the low-end jobs, especially as there are fewer and fewer Americans willing to take those jobs.

This is when we floated along, in a booming economy with an ambiguous, look-the-other-way immigration policy. Immigrants poured to our shores in the nineties, at rates we hadn't seen since the turn of the century. Hundreds of thousands of those immigrants were illegal. But we needed them. Caribbean nannies minded our children. Bangladeshi bused our dishes at the restaurants. Salvadorans cleaned our offices. Mexicans sewed in our factories. Pakistanis and Indians drove our cabs. Sikhs and Guyanese worked our construction sites. You could practically hear the American dream going up, day by day: hammers banging on new construction, subways jammed with working people, the silent tap of computers in industrial parks all over the country.

Then 9/11 hit and it's as if America woke up to realize it had become an immigrant nation – legal and illegal. America was Jackson Heights, Queens, capital of the third world.

Part of the fallout of the post-9/11 period is the question of how much of the American dream is still possible for Indian and South Asian immigrants.

America blares promise everywhere. This is the country where the possibility of remaking yourself perpetually gleams. Life is not a one-shot deal. It's a series of doors, always opening. Ride a subway and there are ads for getting your secretarial or accountant degrees. Open your mail and you can buy land, sell your house, or refinance your home. Drive a car and notice the billboards for employment agencies. Open a newspaper and

read about opening a franchise or getting a loan for a new business.

And in some sense it's true. Americans are more likely to move or change jobs than in any other country in the world. Or there's this fact: a great proportion of American college students are returning students – i.e., older students who go back to school. Many of these students are women – often married, who retrain themselves after raising their children. In no other country in the world do you have forty-something housewives reinventing themselves in such great numbers at universities. We are a restless, endlessly shifting culture, where another life is always possible.

In a sense, the Indian immigrant is peculiarly suited to the America of here and now. The common stereotype is of the great clash between East and West – conservative, traditional, family-bound, austere Indian culture versus a divorce-ridden, materialistic, morally and sexually loose America weaned on TV violence. There's always a bit of truth to any stereotype – America does have a high divorce rate and extreme violence has filtered down, even to our children – witness the horrific massacre at Columbine high school. Yet it's been my observation that the sharp differences between America and India are highly exaggerated, especially in today's global world. More and more, the Indian immigrants who arrive here are coming from a dynamic, changing, and urbanized India, and seem particularly suited to the restless energy of America. They share with Americans a sense of hunger and ambition. And the Indian middle class, obsessed with status and degrees, has an unerring instinct for finding the right employers, schools, neighbourhoods and universities for their children; they are expert at negotiating the

bewildering choices and dangers of American culture – much more so than other immigrants.

Given that Indians do in fact, come from a family-bound culture helps them in the buffeting experience of immigration. An example: in an Indian-American family, a twenty-something graduate student might still live at home and enjoy the support of his parents while doggedly pursuing his MBA. His American counterpart is on his own, paying rent, and probably stacking up student loan debt.

As well, what surprises many immigrants upon coming here is that America is a deeply conservative and religious country. Drive away from the cities and churches abound, along with Jesus Loves You bumper stickers. That has always been true; after all, half of those who came on the Mayflower boat were Puritans and America was seen as their New Eden. America's peculiar mix – traditional, conservative, small town, and regional, while wildly consumerist and mass media – is what Indians immigrate into and eventually flourish in.

If there's any cultural challenge that remains for the Indian immigrant, it is that America is the land of the individual – a value that is inculcated into us from the moment we are born. Young Americans don't necessarily ask their parents what they should do with their lives. They move out when they are eighteen and often live far away. Those that speak the loudest, put themselves forward make themselves heard, will succeed. Elders be damned – this is a culture of youth and brashness.

The conflict between individual versus family is played out again and again in Indian-American homes all over the country: parents pressuring their children towards the 'right professions' or choosing the 'right' mate,

preferably in a semi-arranged marriage. Children not sure what they want – full American privileges or some mixture of the two. I remember, when I would give readings at universities, the Asian and South Asian students' first question was always: 'Your parents let you be a writer?' They were stunned that I didn't have some 'safety' degree under my belt. But I don't think this will hold for long. The conservative, status-conscious generation is going to give way to a new generation – one that's as interested in joining music bands, starting companies, making independent movies, writing plays, backpacking, working for nothing on start-up magazines. That, too, is part of the assimilation process. America is a culture where one is not necessarily rewarded for going by the rules. Initiative, imagination, and risk are often more valued.

Leaving behind the Indian middle class and their generally rosy prospects, however, I'd like to return to the world of Jackson Heights and the atmosphere post 9/11.

Soon after the terrorist attack came a sharp downturn in the economy. Indian software engineers, once buoyed up by good salaries, were given the pink slip and began haunting job fairs, desperate for another assignment before their H1-B visas ran out. Taxi drivers barely picked up fares; waiters and busboys melted into the shadowy margins. Many South Asians – especially Sikhs – spoke of being harassed continually. Recently, two Sikh boys in New Jersey reported being mugged; their attackers pulled off their turbans and cut off their hair. When the police began to investigate, however, it turned out the boys had concocted the story, tired of weathering catcalls and insults, and desperate to fit into America. The incident shat-

tered the tightknit Sikh community and pointed to the pressures these young immigrants face, particularly at this moment in history.

We have become a nation with an ever-widening gap between those that live comfortably, and those that can barely survive. The loss of our industrial base, the erosion of unions, and migration of jobs overseas have contributed to a deep chasm between those who are on 'good' side – the managerial, professional class – and those that fall perilously on the other. We have become a nation of working poor – people working for ten-dollars an hour, with no benefits or security. S. Mitra Kalita, in 'Suburban Sahibs', profiles three Indian immigrant families in suburban New Jersey. It is the story of Harish Patel that best exemplifies those immigrants who scramble to make a living, working double-shifts at low-end jobs, their piece of the American dream slipping further away.

Traditionally, the American dream is made possible generationally: the first generation may lose its social and economic status in immigrating here, the next generation does better, either through college, business or trade, and the third generation is on par with native Americans. The Indian immigration has completely overturned this pattern, given how many Indian immigrants are middle-class and well-educated, and able to settle into their new lives relatively quickly. I think of family friends from Chennai – he's an advertising copy writer, his wife an accountant, they've bought their suburban house in Long Island. They can easily shop and eat south Indian food nearby. The only difference, he says, is at his son's soccer practice, where he's the lone Indian father reading *The Economist* on the sidelines.

At the same time, for other immigrants – and especially those who are undocumented – the possibility of realizing the American dream through their children becomes harder to obtain. Despite some attempts, as in California, to restrict the rights of illegal children immigrants, all immigrant children have full access to public education through high school. However, when it comes to college – the magic passport to the American middle-class – many of these immigrants fall behind. Illegal immigrants can't receive any federal aid to help them with college, and they disappear into the same low-wage work as their parents. Poor legal immigrants may not either be able to scrape up the rising college tuition fees, or their children are needed to help support the family. Because America has become such a divided country, if these children do not find their footing or get an education, the danger of becoming part of the underclass, getting nowhere, is very high.

The promise of America is not just about material gain; it is also about a spiritual sense of reinvention, of bettering and changing the self. The early Indian immigrants in the sixties were not interested in this aspect of American culture: they came here purely for economic betterment and, if anything, became frozen culturally. One hears stories of their second-generation children complaining bitterly that their parents were stuck in fifties India – when they would go back to visit their cousins in India, they were stunned that their relatives had 'moved on'. This is a common immigrant story. But I think it was particularly stark among the Indian immigrants of the sixties, who tended to be insular, clustered into communities that recreated their own regional identities, and focused simply on get-

ting ahead professionally and financially. They hoped to raise their children in a kind of static bubble—which of course is impossible. The nineties changed this. India itself has become more global and the Indian immigrants coming over now—both working and middle class—are part of a much more blended and syncretic universe.

I know I have painted a portrait of our immigration that is at once dire and astoundingly optimistic. But this is the wild promise and brutal reality that is America. And it's what distinguishes us from Europe, which is struggling with its immigrant populations and has no real history of assimilation or multiculturalism. The US has always drawn its strength—economically, culturally, spiritually—from this ever-replenishing fount of migrants. It's what keeps this country young, optimistic, unrealistic, and yet ceaselessly changing.

That, I believe, is what the nation knows, in its heart—even with the shock and trauma of 9/11. We cannot exist without our immigrants, and never will.

My last trip back to India was book-ended by two Indian immigrants I spoke to at great length. On the plane, I shared a row of seats with a woman who told me the story of her life. She was from Gujarat, married into a wealthy industrial family; her husband left her within six months for an American woman. Her sons were left with her in-laws in India, and it took years before she could get them back. For the next few years she struggled as a single mother in Houston, working every kind of job, from dawn until midnight, leaving a pot of food for her children on the stove. Eventually she developed some entrepreneurial ideas—selling various Indian goods in the shops; cooking meals for the local

families, so that she was able to send her sons to college and get them married. These days, she is working on some new business schemes with one of her daughter-in-laws. She tapped her head and said, 'Hey, I'm a Gujarati. I can make money. And my daughter-in-law, she sees it the same way.'

On the way back, my taxi driver was from Chandigarh. He, too, was eager to talk, to tell me about his life here: how he used to make 4,000 rupees a month at a low-level computer job, and finally left to join his sister in Philadelphia; how he'd moved from doing security at the airport to now driving a cab, and could support his widowed mother who had come over to join him. He's proud of the group of friends he's gathered from all over India. Some of his friends even have girlfriends from Guyana. My mother, she was worried at first he told me. But now it's okay.

But he was happiest telling me about his relationship to his old life. 'You know, I call my boss back in India, and now he talks to me differently,' he kept telling me. 'He used to talk to me badly. Now he speaks to me good.'

That, it seemed, was what he was proudest of—something had shifted for him; his past need not be his lifelong fate. No matter how terrible the circumstances of so many immigrants' lives, I'm always amazed by their endless optimism. Perhaps that's why I'm addicted to speaking with immigrants—they always show me the US in a new way. Where I see only reason for criticism and despair, they often show me possibility and generosity, and above all, change.

The young man from Chandigarh drove me to my house. Good luck, I said to him, and gave him a good tip.

Lights, camera, action

MIRA KAMDAR

WHEN I was growing up in Los Angeles in the 1960s, the first question anyone asked me when I said my dad was 'Indian' was 'Oh yeah? What tribe?' My sister Devyani, whom we all called 'Devi', was teased regularly on the school playground with the taunt: 'Davy Crockett, queen of the wild frontier!' It seemed the only way we children could be understood by white Americans was within the context of cowboys (or cowgirls) and Indians. To be an Indian from India was something so entirely outside the normal frame of most people's reference as to be, literally, unimaginable. Our father's exotic looks were automatically identified as Mexican, and people were shocked, even offended, that he did not speak Spanish.

India did not figure at all on the map of American identity in those days. When forced to consider India as our place of origin, the most people could conjure were stock images of British Raj exotica: snake charmers, carapasoned elephants, tigers stretched out below the booted and

jodhpured legs of a triumphant top-hatted colonial administrator. Add to that a full-frontal shot of the Taj Mahal and physically repulsive images of starving people living in filth, and that was about as far as most Americans could, or would, go. 'You've been there? Oh, I would never go to India. I couldn't stand to see all that poverty.'

I remember feeling somewhat 'dirtied' in some way by these comments, as if the simple fact of having visited a country where the poor were allowed to exist alongside the not poor (which was generally not the case in America) caused one to become permanently sullied in some way. Our clean white American friends wanted to preserve their purity by protecting themselves from contaminating images such as those of India's starving millions, images they had been unlucky enough to glimpse from time to time on the evening television news. For us, there was no escaping India. After all, we'd not only seen India, we were Indian. The food we ate at home was

enough alone to confirm how different we were from our American neighbours. Our unpronounceable names, my father's accent, the relatives in saris and safari suits we seemed always to be sponsoring: we didn't have to go to India. In our home, India came to us.

There had always been the odd Indian (of the subcontinental variety) in the United States going back to the days of the Yankee clipper ships in the 18th century. A number of Sikhs made their way to the West Coast, settling in California and Washington states, around the turn of the last century. Some, such as those unlucky enough to try their luck working in the logging industry in Bellingham, Washington were literally run out of the country (to Canada) by white Americans who felt the Punjabis were there to steal their jobs. Those who chose Yuba City and California's Central Valley were luckier, but many of them lost their land to 'alien land exclusion' acts in the 1920s.

The fear of hordes of non-white immigrants sweeping in from Asia, raping white women and stealing jobs and land away from fine, hardworking European-origin Americans and in the process monstrously transforming the United States into something alien from its mythic Anglo beginnings was a very real part of the American psyche throughout the 20th century. Only the 'brain-drain' requirements of the Cold War finally cracked immigration laws specifically designed to preserve the white character of the nation from the dreaded 'yellow (or brown or black or red) peril'.

These laws were so effective that when my father arrived in the United States in 1947, there were only 10,000 persons of Indian origin in the country. He had to travel from Boston all the way to Oklahoma just to find

one other Indian he knew in the vast United States. Today, American residents and citizens of Indian origin number close to two million, and their numbers continue to grow. The first wave, following the liberalization of immigration laws in the late 1960s, was composed primarily of highly skilled professionals: doctors, engineers, scientists. These immigrants were generally successful, put a great store on education, and spawned high-achieving offspring who with, stereotypical regularity – out-stereotyped only by the Chinese kids (sometimes) – won spelling bees, became Valedictorians, Salutatorians, and otherwise graduated cum laude and went on to Harvard, MIT, Stanford and the Wharton School. They all then got jobs as physicians or investment bankers.

The first big wave was followed by different successive waves as US immigration law evolved. During the 1970s and especially the 1980s, more and more non-professionals began immigrating to the United States from India. Certain entrepreneurial niches became, if not dominated by Indian immigrants, at least highly associated with them: motels, newspaper stands, convenience stores. All America knows the character 'Apu' on the popular animated television show *The Simpsons* (though his last name 'Nahasapeemapetilon' is probably known only to the show's junkies). Apu is probably the most famous Indian convenience store owner in the United States. The 'Patel motel' is an expression every Indian immigrant is familiar with, if not every native-born American. The image of the Indian-run gas station is so familiar that the junior senator from New York, Hilary Clinton, recently got in a whole lot of *desi* trouble when she attempted a poor joke about a gas station owner named Mahatma Gandhi.

Then came the tech boom. Silicon Valley's need for more and more workers skilled in information technology led in the 1990s to as many as half the H1B visas for highly skilled workers being given to Indians coming to the United States. The industry couldn't get enough of India's IIT graduates. So many came from IIT campuses in South India alone that many international Indians now swear the best South Indian food in the world is available in California. Some of these whiz-kids learned the American success story so well, it took them no time at all to get a hold of some venture capital, start up their own companies and become, in more than a few cases, international market leaders. The IIT techie immigrant spawned his own pop-culture character in the form of nerdie tech intern Asok in the popular cartoon strip *Dilbert*. Millions of Americans follow the antics of Asok, a young man so brainy he can heat up his tea merely by holding the mug to his forehead and thinking, in their Sunday paper's comic section.

When it began to be difficult to bring smart, highly trained and relatively cheap info-tech workers to the United States on a reduced number of H1B visas, some of these market leaders decided to take advantage of new communications technologies and take the jobs to workers in India. The idea caught on like wildfire, capturing not only the imagination of Indian entrepreneurs looking for a hot ticket back to the motherland but also that of every US company looking to save a little money on back-office processes and services ranging from call centres to data processing to financial market analysis.

How could I have ever imagined as a child that what I so longed for in those days – for Americans to notice India, to talk about India, to see that

India existed – would be achieved in the 2004 election year by outsourcing? How could I have foreseen that the T-Shirts that said ‘My parents went to Disneyland and all I got was this lousy T-Shirt’ would be replaced some day by ones lamenting ‘My job went to India and all I got was this lousy T-Shirt?’ Suddenly, the tide of the Yellow Peril was reversed: instead of Asian workers pouring into the United States to work for slave wages (in their own country they had it even worse and they were used to sleeping ten to a bed anyway), now it looked like that ‘giant sucking sound’ that used to come from down Mexico way had been amplified about a thousand times and was coming from, of all places, India. What was the world coming to?

Outsourcing put India on the covers of *Business Week* and *Wired* magazines. Outsourcing put India on the evening news every night. Outsourcing has become one of the hottest issues in a down-and-dirty presidential race, even threatening to eclipse gay marriage. When good American jobs, jobs for educated people, start leaving for India, what can the nation be coming to? As if we didn’t have enough problem with terrorists from ‘over there’. They want to kill us and if they can’t kill us by exploding a dirty bomb at rush hour in Grand Central Station, they’ll content themselves with taking our jobs.

Tom Friedman, ever the champion of globalization as a force for nothing but good in this world, begged readers of *The New York Times* in one of his recent columns on India to consider that unemployed white-collar workers in America were a small price to pay if their jobs could provide young people in countries like India something better to do with their time than grow frustrated with the West’s wealth and freedom and commit ter-

rorist acts against the United States. (‘Help fight the war on terror: become unemployed.’) As if young people in India (and not, for example, in that old Bush family-friendly nation Saudi Arabia – hello!) represented that kind of threat. Amid all the election-year hysteria, the simple fact that the number of jobs outsourced to India represents a tiny fraction of the three million or so American jobs lost since George W. Bush became president is bound to remain elusive.

Fortunately for me, an Indian-American whose father was, yes, an engineer (a classic brain-drain case who worked on nothing less than the ultimate Cold War project: the Apollo missions), there are other forces at work shaping America’s image of India, namely Indian-Americans. Call them NRIs, PIOs, next gen OBIs or whatever acronym you can think of, Americans of Indian origin are making the American scene. There was already the international diaspora jet set, mostly concentrated in New York – the Deepak Chopras, the Ismail Merchants, the newly New Yorkized-formerly-from-London Salman Rushdies. These are members of the Indian diaspora uber-class who remain, in the popular American imagination, atomized denizens of that rarified world known as ‘celebrities’.

Recently, however, it has begun to be possible to see Americans of Indian origin on a daily basis on television. These people sound like Main Street and dress like Wall Street (or Miami Beach, or Beverly Hills, or Ralph Lauren) even if they look slightly darker and more exotic than, say, the *Today Show*’s Katie Couric. Take CNN doctor-cum-reporter Sanjay Gupta, from whom millions of Americans get their news about the medical fate of our boys in Iraq.

Sanjay Gupta, described by *India Today* as ‘medical correspondent, war reporter and sex symbol at large’ is a name and a face appearing in living rooms (and perhaps even bedrooms) across the United States every day.

Sanjay Gupta is the television version of what has become a familiar fixture in many American lives: the South Asian doctor. Add the doctor to the convenience store owner from whom Americans buy their daily paper and soda, the gas station owner from whom they fill up their tank, the array of Indian frozen entrees in the frozen-food section of any major supermarket, the Indian restaurant at the local strip mall, and the Indian in a call centre in Bangalore who just helped them obtain a Citicard credit increase, and India begins to feel to Americans less like Timbuktu and more like, say, Ireland (well, maybe not quite yet).

Real-life films such as *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* have been extraordinarily successful not only because each was, in its own right, simply a great film, but also because the Indians portrayed in these films are so much like, well, everyone else. These movies, both made by Indian diaspora women directors, depict Indians at home in the globalized world, whether it’s the trials and tribulations of a young woman negotiating conflicting expectations between her Indian immigrant home and her British teen environment in *Bend it Like Beckham* or a young woman juggling the conflicting expectations of patriarchal family values under siege, an American *desi* husband-to-be and her own desires in *Monsoon Wedding*. Diaspora locations from the UK to America feel increasingly like home to immigrants from India and are taken for granted as such by their children. This is true not only in the

Indian ghettos of Edison, New Jersey, Jackson Heights, Queens or Devon Street in Chicago but in small towns, suburban housing tracts and urban high-rises across the country.

Most importantly, America feels like home where America really, on some level, exists: in the imagination. What America is and what it is to be an American is an ever-evolving concept, continuously reinvented by the current crop of immigrants. When my father arrived in the United States in 1947, pizza was an exotic dish most Americans had never tasted. When one considers that now you can get a 'dosa wrap' in any number of American cities, not to mention the ubiquitous presence of the Punjabi food most of the world knows as Indian cuisine, the measure of how Indianized America has become begins to be felt. The stories of immigrants to the United States from India are being added to preceding layers of immigrant stories, becoming so integrated into the larger American narrative that Jhumpa Lahiri's short-story collection *The Interpreter of Maladies* could win a Pulitzer prize for 'distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life.'

Indeed, America has become so South Asianized that *Newsweek* recently ran a cluster of articles under the rubric 'American Masala', declaring in the subtitle of the influence of subcontinentals on the superpower: 'They've changed the way we eat, dress, work and play.' Most Americans take the presence of *chai* on the menu at Starbucks for granted (if in versions as alien to the Indian original as a vanilla-flavoured and iced). Many are becoming comfortable with Indian music, whether of the 'Asian dub' variety, remixed with hip-hop or listened to straight. 'Basement Bhangra' at SOB's in New York, presided over

by disc-jockey queen DJ Rekha, just named the 'best DJ in New York' by *Time Out New York* magazine, has been dubbed 'the best party in NYC' by *New York* magazine. The latest fitness craze in California is the 'Masala Bhangra Workout'. Hindi film songs have begun to appear in the most unlikely venues, from the popular television series *The Sopranos* to Lata Mangeshkar singing on the soundtrack of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, starring Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet.

Indian-origin director M. Night Shyamalan hit the Hollywood big time with his blockbuster *The Sixth Sense*, followed by the successful *Signs*, which featured 'documentary' footage of the film's nasty alien invaders igniting mass terror in India. Bollywood director Shekhar Kapur struck Hollywood gold and garnered kudos for his movie *Elizabeth*, a breakthrough film for actress Cate Blanchett. Meanwhile, Bollywood has begun to break into American mainstream theatres with films such as *Lagaan*.

Diaspora actors are going mainstream as well. Actress Parminder Nagra has been able to parley her success in *Bend it Like Beckham* into a major role in one of America's most popular television dramas, *ER*. She's been a smashing success. Soon, American television audiences may be treated to the first Indian-American television sitcom. Casting calls have gone out to the community for an NBC comedy pilot called *Nevermind Nirvana*. According to the press release from NBC Studios in Los Angeles, actors are being solicited for five roles: Sunil 'Sonny' Mehta, a soon-to-be medical graduate suffering from doubts about his professional choice, his younger brother Raju, only too happy to see his brother experiencing

existential angst, father Arjun, a successful doctor described in the casting call as no less than 'an East Indian Walter Matthau' (really, I'm not making this up), mother Sarita, also a doctor, and a family servant Govind (non-speaking role).

The reality of the Indian diaspora community is far more diverse than the successful Gujarati doctor model depicted in *Nevermind Nirvana*. (I write this despite having close family who rather perfectly fit this stereotype.) Within the community, there are deep divisions of class, length of time 'off the boat', religion, ethnicity, caste and political orientation. Though, as a group, Indian Americans are a 'model minority' with annual earnings averaging \$60,000 per year – far above the general American average – a growing percentage of Indian immigrants do not have advanced degrees, do not speak English well, and live below the poverty line. Many highly educated Indians who arrive in the United States on, say, an H1B visa, are surprised by how communally segregated even the educated upwardly mobile Indian-American community is compared with the urban Indian community. It is often the case in America that Telugu-speakers don't 'mix' with Punjabis don't mix with Gujaratis don't mix with Bengalis, let alone Hindus mixing with Muslims.

The Indian-American Hindu community is also highly 'saffronized' boasting large support, both in numbers and in dollars, for *Hindutva* causes. The VHPA (Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America), the Overseas Friends of the BJP, and Hindu Unity are powerful groups whose mission is to propagate the idea among identity-insecure Indian immigrants and their vulnerable offspring that Indian=Hindu=supporter of hindutva. The summer camps run by the VHPA

have been able to successfully indoctrinate many unsuspecting second-generation Indian Americans so that they emerge into young adulthood with a very narrow definition of what it is to be an Indian. A young man from Kerala, a Syrian Christian, recounted to me that when he went to a meeting of the popular South Asian students club at New York University, he was shunned by many of the students who, zealous in the purity of their 'Indianness', told him: 'How can you be Indian with a name like "Abraham"? That's not an Indian name.'

The tales are endless of the OBI young woman who can decently perform Bharatnatyam, sings a little Carnatic music, possesses a stunning wardrobe of expensive *saris* and *salwar kameez*, trusts her parents to find her a rich husband and who, by all these indices, considers herself to be truly and deeply Indian only to visit India for the first time in her life and discover, to her horror, that her *pukka desi* cousins in Delhi or Mumbai are wearing Armani Xchange, spending every night out clubbing, dating like crazy, couldn't figure out how to properly drape a sari if their life depended on it, and would rather die than be caught performing in a college-student *bhangra* production sporting garishly coloured matching *chunia choli*.

At the same time, the Indian diaspora in America boasts strong, politically progressive groups supporting everything from gay rights to anti-globalization to a pan South Asian-American identity that trumps divisions not only among Indians but between Indians and their fellow subcontinentals. The confrontations between SALGA, South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, and the annual organizers of the India Day parade in New York are legendary. Trikone is an activist group based in

San Francisco for Gay, Lesbian and (according to their website) Trisexual South Asians. Active women's groups are addressing the problem of domestic violence in the South Asian community: Sakhi in New York, Maitri in San Francisco, Sawera in Portland, Oregon, to name a few. Berkeley, California-based EKTA provides a highly visible progressive South Asian network through its outspoken condemnation of the Gujarat massacres in 2002, its current 'Travelling Film South Asia' tour, and its participation in the annual Bay Area Progressive South Asians Conference.

The struggle for who gets to define the community is far from over. In this presidential election year, Indian-American political clout is being felt as never before. One simple factor is the increase in the Indian-origin population. Another factor is a new willingness by Indian Americans to get involved in the American political process. From municipal councils, to governorships and congressional races, all the way up to key positions in the current, and certainly in future, administrations, Indian American's are increasingly visible in the American political process.

Perhaps the most potent sign of Indian-American political clout is the emergence of powerful political action groups in Washington. USINPAC (United States India Political Action Committee), only founded in the Fall of 2002, already counts more than 27,000 members. IALIPAC (Indian American Leadership Initiative Political Action Committee) is another influential group. There is the IARC (Indian American Republican Committee) and NAIRA (National Asian Indian Republican Association).

I recently received an email from a prominent Indian-American businessman drumming up support

for South Asians for Kerry for President. Long wooed by Democrats and Republicans alike for their individual deep pockets, Indian Americans have, only in the last couple of years, transformed themselves from a loose assortment of successful individuals into organized, focused political forces to be reckoned with. There is no doubt that groups such as USINPAC will play an increasingly powerful role in US domestic and international policy, no matter which party is in the White House or who controls the Senate and the House.

The relationship between India and the Indian diaspora in America is an evolving family saga, with every stock character from every known epic represented. In this respect, it is not unlike a Hindi movie, filled with heroes and villains, prodigal sons and daughters, long-suffering mothers, misperceptions that cause the characters to act in ways opposite to their interests, love traps and triangles. The desire of the Indian diaspora for India is mirrored by the desire of India for its diaspora population.

In the recent film *Kal Ho Na Ho*, we learn that to succeed in America, you have to get in touch with your Indian roots: the heroine's family's restaurant business, Café New York, is doomed until they change 'York' to 'Delhi', replace the American flag in the window with an Indian flag, and start serving up some good Indian *khana*. American customers pour in. What's more, the Indians take all the customers away from the Chinese restaurant across the street. An even better medium for capturing the India-diaspora relationship may be the television soap opera, not so much the planned American serial *Nevermind Nirvana* as the current Indian hit *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*. Tune in for the next installment.

Books

**THE PENGUIN HISTORY OF EARLY INDIA:
From Origins to AD 1300** by Romila Thapar.
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2003.

INTERPRETATIONS of early India during the latter half of the 20th century have in many ways been impacted by the writings of Romila Thapar, one of its most prolific historians. *Early India* as a mirror reflects these endeavours, but more emphatically, also captures in a decisive way the various other interpretations that have gone into the making of what we today understand as the history of early India.

Generations of graduate students and lay readers had found in the earlier Penguin *History of India*, Vol. I, written by Romila Thapar some four decades

back, an incisive, synoptic and yet, a panoramic survey of early Indian history that became a ready reference for the initiate. The new edition, now entitled *Early India*, is a substantive revision of this volume providing not only new historical information, wherever available, but also projecting an interpretative dimension to early India that has become necessary due to the proliferation of revisionist accounts of ancient India blurring historical explanations. The essential aims of this enterprise have been well laid out in the introduction to the book. However, what is a consciously planned and exceptionally well executed is chapter I, 'Perceptions of the Past', where Thapar raises critical questions of how historians need to approach the craft of history writing today within parameters of

its evolution in modern India over the last two hundred years or so. Before commenting on some of these points, first a brief idea about the organization of the book under discussion.

'Early India From Origins to AD 1300' is an authoritative and richly textured general history book. It is divided into 13 chapters, prefaced with a list of the chronology of early India and ending with a general bibliography on different subjects preceded by select bibliographies, extremely well-updated under each chapter head for further reading. Thirteen maps have been appropriately included to help understand the historical information within its spatial parameters for different periods. There is also an essential glossary of terms.

Thapar has updated the factual base on various aspects of our early history that have emerged since the publication of the Penguin edition. The book terminates at 1300 AD instead of 1526 AD as in the earlier version. In this there is a conscious effort to move away from demarcating periods based on political chronological fixtures to those defined more inclusively on broad social, economic and ideological parameters. Importantly, the revised empirical content of the book goes beyond an addition of new information on the facts and figures available from fresh research conducted by scholars in recent decades. More significantly, it has skillfully merged possible interpretative frameworks within which its potential reading can be effectively done. This is what makes this general survey of history so special.

The book covers the period from prehistoric times, following the different patterns that led to the rise of cities and civilizations. The rise of the great and small polities in different periods outlining the reasons for their emergence and decline have been detailed in-depth, beginning with the Mauryas and culminating with the Cholas. The ideological forces of change as reflected in the teachings of the Buddha on the one hand, and the content and context in which the heroic epics of India – the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* – emerged on the other, find their place as part of this thickly textured narrative. Political and religious history is further interwoven into the social and economic fabric of the times. These aspects are then placed in all their vivid complexity into highlighting simultaneously the artistic, literary, scientific, technological and material dimensions of the times. Each chapter gives equal importance to a discussion on the way ideological forces and the making of institutionalized religion on the subcontinent questioned; as well as reformu-

lated, the changing identities of people. Hence one would have no disagreement with the blurb announcement of the foreign hardback edition of the book: 'Thapar provides an incomparably vivid and nuanced picture of India. Above all, she shows the rich mosaic of diverse kingdoms, landscapes, languages and beliefs.'

It has often been the case in the general histories of India that the regions get totally marginalized, only emerging sporadically in separate compartments for discussion and description. Thapar's present work has not only made discussions on the different regions of the subcontinent an integral part of her general framework, but has also included separate chapters where necessary. Perhaps the only part of the subcontinent that does not adequately figure for discussion is the extreme northeast. This is perhaps due to the fact that it still awaits work on its archaeological traditions. In fact, it is pertinent to note that literary and inscriptive sources for the regions beyond the Ganga and the Brahmaputra are totally absent for these early periods of their history. Nonetheless, Thapar has effectively woven into the structure of her overall narrative, information on regions especially from the Deccan and the South while, at the same time, drawing in empirical contexts from these regions to enrich the larger debates of interpreting the history of the country as a whole.

The chapter on Antecedents (pp. 69-97) dealing with the prehistoric and proto-historic environments, for instance, has a valuable discussion on the Megaliths, a culture that was unique to the regions south of the Vindhyas. Similarly two chapters (7 and 8) on the post-Mauryan period (200 BC - AD 300) provide a substantial discussion on the Deccan, in particular since these deal with the rise of trade and the role of the mercantile communities and the emerging political identity of the region as markedly different from changes that were taking place elsewhere in India. Separate chapters (10 and 11) focusing only with the South deal with the region's history in totality from roughly around the 6th century AD up to the 14th century AD.

There is a set pattern in which history unfolds in these various chapters. An important aspect of this study is that as one moves from one period to another and from one region to another, Thapar's narrative emphasizes elements of both continuity and change. She does not see, for instance, the important transition from what is generally called 'ancient India' to what has currently come to be called 'early medieval India' in terms of a disjunction or disruption. Thus a conscious

effort is made to incorporate interpretative dimensions that would like to look at this period of Indian history in terms of the rise of feudalism while, at the same time, pointing to the features that she prefers to subtitle and designate as ‘emerging regional kingdoms’ (pp. 326-343) and the ‘establishing authorities and structures’ (pp. 363-392). These descriptions effectively bring forth a picture of how it is impossible to impose theoretical variables for explaining social change that do not take into account substantial local and regional variations. This is one of few general histories of early India that informs us how our deep-rooted social and regional identities are today reflected in tendencies that were being formulated way back in historical time. These are just a few signs and markers that illustrate how well Thapar is able to intricately weave historical complexities that must necessarily be handled in writing about regions that ultimately provide us with a well-patterned texture of time and space.

While one significant highlight of this book is about how regional histories must necessarily be located within the framework of interpretation for the country as a whole, the other, with which the book begins, is on how the various ‘perceptions’ of the past constructed within modern historiographical frameworks should be read. The latter also raises pertinent questions about the relationship of the historian with her/his sources. Given that the content of this chapter is more an analytical presentation of different methodological and theoretical frameworks that a modern interrogator of the past uses to write history, it is problematic that Thapar has designated this chapter as ‘Perceptions of the Past’. It is true that perceptions are rooted in narrative structures but the ones that Thapar foregrounds are those that are built around solid ideological foundations that seek to provide ‘explanations’ for what happened in the past and not simply provide ‘perceptions’ of the same. Historical explanations then, as Thapar goes on to argue, are built on ‘constructions’ – beginning with the various assumptive frameworks of colonial times like the Orientalist, Utilitarian and so on. Part of the process of these constructions was the making of sources that Thapar defines in terms of ‘Discovering’ the Indian past and positing it as the complete ‘Other’ (pp. 7-12).

By and large these explanatory models and methodological tools set the stage for a further writing of Indian history. Thapar moves on to critique the nationalist and communal historiographies of early India and it is clear from these arguments too that these are not ‘perceptions’ but explanations well-

rooted in ideologies that wanted to selectively reclaim the past. The subsequent discussion on the influences of Marxist historiography and the debates it generated for reconsidering and refining the way early Indian history could best be written should also not be seen as mere ‘perceptions’ of the past. In fact, by titling the chapter thus, Thapar creates an impression that each of these points of view was valid within the historical contexts that they were written. Usually this is what is said of literary perceptions, namely, that they reflect the historical and social contexts of their time. Thapar ends this chapter informing historians that ‘texts’ are not ‘histories’ (p. 34) and, therefore, is absolutely clear about distinguishing ‘history’ from ‘literature’. In this sense it would have been appropriate to herald this chapter as ‘Historical Explanations’ or ‘Theories of Interpretation and the Past’ (p. 35).

This is suggested for no other reason but for what Thapar herself has articulated: ‘Theories of interpretation... are not intended as inevitably sequential, although there are causal links between them... Since they are not merely an extension or reversal of data, they are intended to explain complex problems, they have varied existences. Some theories decline or die out. Others persist, generally in a modified form. Some surface aggressively if their function as ideologies of political mobilization is more important than their function as historical explanation’ (p. 35). However, if we allow each of these so-called ‘perceptions of the past’ to reign then we would, howsoever unconsciously, be permitting ourselves to allow for equal validity to all as ways of perceiving the past. That is surely not what Thapar has intended in this chapter because for her history is as much about ‘facts’ as it is about ‘concepts’ (p. 33).

Nonetheless, it would be appropriate to suggest that the inclusion of chapter I in the present edition of the Penguin history of early India, provides added value. It is a necessary bridge that both informed readers and professional historians must tread before they enter into the domain of the past to which it is sometimes tenuously but intimately attached. Thapar firmly provides one solid link that, for many years to come, should prevent people from falling off into the realm of an imagined or caricatured past – something that none of us can afford to do in the context of contemporary concerns wherein the past is being used to define our agendas for the present and the future.

Aloka Parasher-Sen

HINDUISM IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE edited
by Antony Copley. Oxford University Press,
Delhi, 2003.

THIS book attempts to explore the complex linkages between religious reform and the emergent dynamics of Hindutva. The volume is divided into two related parts under the headings – ‘Varieties of Nationalism’, and ‘Public Awareness and Private Spheres’. While the first part is chiefly concerned with the ideological appropriation of cultural icons like Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo by Hindutva, the second takes a close peek at *sampradayas*, including contemporary groupings such as Mata Amritanandmayi Mission.

In his introduction the editor lists questions we all ask and are unable to answer with any finality. These include – Why does the Hindu majority fear other religions and behave like a minority? How far did the Hindu reform movements remain loyal to the catholicity [when did we all begin to agree on this] of Hinduism? What is the relation between traditional Hinduism and its Hindutva version which belongs so completely to the public sphere that its [Hindutva's] personal aspect is now reduced to nothingness? The last is particularly poignant as there seems something seriously incongruous about the image of a Togadia or a Singhal in a state of devout solitude or even as a participant in a disinterested and peaceful meditation session!

But the essays in the book focus on a number of other questions, all of which are related to the contemporary anxieties around the future course of Hindutva – a fully developed ideology that is finding increasing allegiance through a series of growth spurts in unlikely parts of the country often among unlikely populations – unlikely till we find a suitable explanation of course. Some of the articles are around *sampradayas* such as Hiltrud Rüstau's study of Sri Sarada Math, ‘The Hindu Woman's Right to Sanyasa’, and may seem to slant away from the main focus. But here again the question is – ‘Can the realization of the right to *sanyasa* contribute to further progress on the equality of gender?’

While the anxiety (or even panic) around the future of Hindutva is easy to empathize with, it is difficult to go along with the assumption that secularism as a goal is sufficiently clearly defined in the Indian context and is for that reason even desirable when we are not even sure of basic neighbourly tolerance any more. As a student of philosophy I wonder if, in a given situation, people are not willing to follow basic human decency, is it right or pragmatic to pose ideals of a

higher order involving complex concepts? Also, should all ideological analysis in such a situation be about gauging how far from secularism a given ideological dynamic is? It would seem that the simple journalistic idea of tolerance is adequate for the purpose of such ‘measurements’ and carries solid operative meaning even in extreme situations like communal riots.

One also cannot ignore the lingering feeling that the underlying assumption behind the studies is that the Hindu story is deviating from the familiar pathways to secularism after a long phase of conformity (Congress rule), and that such deviations are ‘interesting’ phenomena to explain. If such evolutionism has been firmly rejected by biology, why do we still carry on with it in social thought? Are our heightened anxiety levels a good enough justification? Why does it become difficult to admit that Hindutva is as ‘valid’ an interpretation of Hinduism as other enlightened interpretations, that the trouble with Hindutva lies in its anti-humanist stance and in the fact that the advocates of Hindutva are unwilling to even consider other possible interpretations of traditional Hinduism. We all know that tolerance (precious to us indeed) is just a part of the Hindu value system, which is why the proponents of Hindutva find it easy to jettison it, just as others choose to expand on the liberal aspects of the Hindu tradition.

To come back to shared anxiety, while the core idea of Hindutva itself has not progressed far beyond its sophisticated Savarkar version, it has managed to become more rugged and easy to use, embracing a wider population. What has however shown a great ferment and vitality, if you like, is the ‘idea’ of BJP and the NDA coalition. If Hindutva is seen as a part of the rise of BJP, as part of a larger story, the perspective would seem to change somewhat. The almost weekly fluctuations reflected in the utterings of the two leaders, Vajpayee and Advani, would indicate that the buoyancy of the BJP idea lies in its episodic (discontinuous) acceptance of Hindutva. Conversely, by being able to punctuate their rhetoric with Hindutva, the two leaders are forging something new, which is perhaps yet to take a clear shape. In this sense the BJP and indeed the NDA is the greatest appropriator of ideas. Given its brief track record it has laid its claims on every type of ideology except communism. The Congress mammoth on the other hand has shown tolerance for the left and kept its distance from the extreme right.

In her essay, ‘Secularizing the Sacred Cow: The Relationship between Religious Reform and Hindu Nationalism’, Therese O’Toole looks at the issue of cow protection, coming to the conclusion that there is

no clear difference between the communalists and the secularists on this matter. Cow protection seems a deceptively minor political issue precisely because it has attracted a general consensus despite being a highly potent symbol, capable of transforming a peace-loving people into enraged demons. The author's insight goes a long way since it allows us to fully register a new ideological process where the BJP looks more and more like the Congress as the days go by. The VHP and the idea of Hindutva give it a door of opportunity that the Congress will explore with great reluctance. But like Digvijay Singh, the former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, the Congress too is capable of religious rhetoric in a somewhat less dedicated way. Let us not forget that Digvijay Singh has/d an impeccable record as a secularist, even as he showed a perverse strain when politically cornered. The question is – are BJP's overtures a bit like Indira Gandhi's flirting with the left, a flirtation which had such a soul-stirring impact on the CPI that it never recovered. The present problem with the Congress is that it is trying hard to be different from the BJP, which is not the same thing as being oneself. Mulayam Yadav on the other hand is rewriting the script of Lohiaite socialism, and one does not know whether it might converge with George Fernandes' at some point of time. The truth is that the BJP's ideological manoeuvrings have changed the map of political values and everyone is busy realigning their own signposts.

I carried out a small experiment before writing this review. Over a couple of days I watched the two major religious (Hindu) channels to carry out a quick impressionistic reality check on the middle classes. With one exception, not a single guru seemed to be concerned with the issues of Hindutva. This genteel private social aspect may be a bulwark against Hindutva as it does not align well with the VHP ideology, but there are no guarantees. Ideologies on the move are good at appropriating, as the two articles on Vivekananda and Aurobindo in the present volume indicate. If secularists are easily willing to brand these figures as non-liberal deviants, how can we stop the Hindutva advocates from using them as decorative symbols or even brands? Our problem seems to be that when we look at ideas we tend to chloroform them before dissecting them instead of looking at the lively tensions and ambivalences of figures like Vivekananda. The advocates of Hindutva do the same and reduce Vivekananda to a small list of held beliefs. In brief, how does one stop the appropriators from appropriating? This is the one anxiety that I am unwilling to

share, since it all begins to sound like an intellectual free for all rather than a debate. It is much more interesting for example to note that even as the Arya Samaj has lost a great deal of its vitality, it has also provided sufficient moral space for a Swami Agnivesh, probably the most unusual and intellectually exciting swami of our times.

In a concluding paragraph, the editor admits that '...the inner links between Hindutva and the religious reform movements may remain uncertain and that the very character of Hindutva itself is difficult to define.' Let us be clear. The different paths to Hindutva may be difficult to track, but we certainly know well what we fear most, and define most vividly, and continue to redefine the menace till we are fairly sure. The current elections have gone by and the Hindutva voice has been silent. Is it because there is a reversal of a common trend, namely will Hindutva become an issue after the election? That would be dangerous since the use of Hindutva to get votes is one thing, to apply it in daily governance is something else. Thus far it has been the other way round, something the VHP has long felt bitter about.

The coming months will prove if Hindutva continues to be a full-fledged ideology or is reduced to just an instrument in the ever-increasing ideological arsenal of the 'shining' BJP. In dramatic contrast the RSS has not produced a single new idea in the last fifty years, except the constant renewing of its waiting game. It is time to ask the question – why does the RSS not shed its pretensions to being a 'social organization' and come out in the open, if it really feels like a victor. Or is the RSS too utopian to be happy with the piece-meal actions of BJP or VHP, regarding them as huge compromises with reality? My paranoia about Hindutva would be considerably pacified if I knew exactly how opportunistic or principled the RSS is. Like the CPI/CPM, it won't let on.

Coming back to the theme of instrumentality, it is a factor that can come full circle. Hindutva instrumentalized Hinduism, putting it to political use. Will something similar happen to Hindutva as well, in which case it would have transformed vastly in appearance and spirit. The current situation is interesting – Vajpayee is accused of betrayal by both – the liberals and the VHP. We are witnessing an interesting dialectic between promise and betrayal. What is the end game? An elaborate ideology is taking shape through default, not through clear definitions and avowals, but through omissions and silences. This carries its own dangers and Vajpayee-Advani-Fernandes trio

are accumulating a pile of unspoken, but implicit ideology. Democratic, liberal values require explicit commitment and not playful, coy silences, glances and gestures.

It is tempting in the interim to make predictions, and indeed when the BJP shows its 'true colour' (given the coalition, will it even get a chance to show its true colour?), there will be those who might say, 'I told you so.' Also, given the voter's continued insistence, will the BJP demote Hindutva from a solid principle to a sentiment we may not even notice for a long time? In which case, will religion again be religion, life as usual! That is the one thing that seems unlikely, as BJP or no BJP, Hindutva is here to stay with us, like many other extreme ideologies. Indian politics has always provided space for sideshows that have no apparent relation to the core business of politics, such as separatist movements without desire to separate, film stars, sports, celebrity events, even marriages. When Arun Jaitley makes available his house for Virender Sehwag's wedding what do you call it? Wedding? Politics?

The above book engages with a number of questions which are far from academic, and its sense of seething urgency makes it a readable volume. When academic writing gets businesslike, good ideas follow, and this collection, including the editor's introduction, will be a pleasure to both who agree or disagree.

Ratnakar Tripathy

ASIAN CYBERACTIVISM: Freedom of Expression and Media Censorship by Steven Gan, James Gomez and Uwe Johannen. Friedrich Naumann Stifung, Singapore, 2004.

THIS is a volume with a comfortable mix of issues spread geographically and thematically. Co-edited by a journalist who has suffered being 'spiked' by his editor (Steven Gan), 'a writer and an activist' who wrote 'Self-censorship: Singapore's shame' at a time when it has been wisest to toe the disciplinarian establishment line (James Gomez), and a Regional Director at the Southeast Asian desk of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (Uwe Johannen), the essays move sprightly through a significant part of the Asian continent. Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Cambodia, Korea, Burma, Thailand, India... the list is like reading the index of an atlas, and the volume sticks to its promise of a continent wide spread. And, interestingly,

the focus is on the politics of cyberactivism and censorship in Asia.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which affirms the right to freedom of expression in article 19, has been ratified by many Asian countries. This article also allows restrictions to this right 'for the protection of national security or of public order.' In many Asian countries, this has been used to justify, and assert, censorship and political repression. Judith Clarke in 'Democracy and new communication technology: the Asian struggle', begins with an early recognition that 'the fledgling governments of post-colonial developing countries sought to control the media in the name of nation building' (p. 3). She provides a graphic account of developments in communications technology in Asia and takes us on a journey through the telecom and internet growth in Asia. Her final assessment that 'the status quo of the "fourth estate" will be unbalanced by the media products of the new technology because of lack of verifiability of content' but may be balanced again by providing 'plenty of material for comparison.'

Indrajit Banerjee in 'Cyber democracy in Asia: issues, challenges and prospects' builds along the premise that we cannot expect that new technologies will achieve greater democratisation. He concludes that in the backdrop of limited reach of the internet in Asian countries, and the extent of internet control and censorship, 'Internet alone cannot be an isolated and decisive process of democratisation.' In contrast, Geoff Long ('Why internet still matters for Asian democracy') makes a case for the significance of internet as an instrument for bringing about democratic change in Asia. He cites Mongolia in illustration, and how e-learning by a rural nomadic population contributed to control of government spending, as a potent use of the Internet.

Post 9/11 when the United States of America declared its War on Terrorism, one of the many frontiers on which the war was declared was the cyber world. Alex Pabico's 'New Media as big brother: the Philippines after September 11' draws attention to legislations enacted to deal with cyber crimes, and the initiatives of civil society groups who sensed surveillance in these proposals. In a clear move sacrificing privacy for national security concerns, the National Security Council (NSC), the country's intelligence policy-making body, proposed to Congress that judges be allowed to authorise the application of Carnivore type programmes to read email messages and trace addresses for intelligence gathering. Lukes Luwarso's

concern ('Manufacturing control: new legislations threaten democratic gains in Indonesia') is that security legislations may undermine the internet's potential for providing free space for civil society. Terence Lee's 'Emulating Singapore: towards a model for internet regulation in Asia' demonstrates how even authoritarian regimes can preside over countries with high internet penetration and digital communication tools, without losing links to the global economy. However, Lee cautions that the Singapore model of media and internet control may not yield the best results for other countries, what with Singapore being a 'young society' and 'small country'.

In recent years, the Chinese government has increased its control over information on the internet, including blocking anti-government websites and the Google search engine in September 2002. Many laws have been enacted to govern internet activities in China. Li Xiguang's piece 'ICT and the demise of propaganda: China's internet experience' shows how, in closed regimes such as China where new communication technologies have been harnessed by the public for the purposes of freedom of speech, internet provides space for cyberactivism to flourish. Robert Van Koert in 'The internet in Vietnam: party propaganda or infotainment?' suggests that the internet in these strictly regulated societies can also be used as a means of achieving economic success.

In January 2003 offices of the internet news agency Malaysiakini were raided by the Malaysian police over the contents of its website. During the raid, the Malaysiakini editor was detained and interrogated by the police, and office computer equipment confiscated. In part four of the book which deals with 'alternative media', Tong Yee Siong discusses how the survival of Malaysiakini is undermined by the difficulty of keeping the portal economically viable rather than by threats from the government. Zulfikar Mohamad Shariff in 'Fateh.Com: challenging control over Malay/Muslim voices in Singapore' shows how alternative media becomes vulnerable when government takes political and legal actions to silence them. We do, however, miss the mention of other regional developments such as with Tehelka.com where governmental reaction of the exposé by Tehelka of corruption in arms deals in the country forced them to close office.

Susanna George and Luz Maria Martinez ('Digital advocacy and women's movement: global success, grassroots challenge') highlight the potential of the internet as a medium of mass communication for dissemination of information relating to women's move-

ment at a global level, but at the same time recognise the minimal access to internet at the grassroots level. Prangtip Daoreung's 'Thai civil society and government control: a cyber struggle?' explores, at the government level, the problem in the form of contradicting policies regarding the country's IT development. Zafauallah Khan in his piece 'Cyber jihad: fighting the infidels from Pakistan' starts with a quote from www.azzam.com which reads, 'We strongly urge Muslim internet professionals to spread, disseminate news and information about jihad...' The chapter elaborates on how cyber jihad continues to defy the global war against terrorism. The paper maps the development of cyber jihad in Pakistan's virtual world (p. 442, 448).

Part six on the 'Diaspora communities' opens with an essay by Kasun Ubayasin where she introduces us to the struggle of Sri Lankan Tamils for self-determination which has lasted for over quarter of a century. Kasun explains how the diaspora informed the world of the Eelam struggle through an elaborate propaganda and information network which relies heavily on the internet. Internet in the Burmese struggle has been explored in Zaw Oo's paper 'Mobilising online: the Burmese diaspora's cyber strategy against the junta.'

India features in the last section. Seetha's 'Incompatible systems: information technology and policies in India' would have it that the political culture in India has proved to be the main barrier in the use of information technology. She sees an irony in a country which is one of the biggest manufacturers of software in the world, but which has such a limited utilisation of technology especially when it comes to politics (p. 571, 575). Men Kimseng's 'Online opposition: the Sam Rainsy party website in Cambodian politics' maps the development of websites by political parties. The paper takes the illustration of the Sam Rainsy party, the main opposition in Cambodia, and explains how the website was used to influence voters overseas during the 2003 elections. 'Democracy @ work: the 2002 presidential elections in Korea' by Eun-Jeung Lee is an optimistic statement that how online politics can positively influence the motivation and participation of citizens (p. 629).

Yet, possibly cyberactivism might become an influence in the politics of the region. A caution: this is a book on technology as much as it is on the social science of the internet and its control. A familiarity with cyber terms will make the read smoother.

Rajat Khosla

Comment

Sociology and literature

WHAT is literature? All writing that lasts, and is relevant over large spans of time without seeming outdated, constitutes a body of literature. Sociologists have produced great literature. It is impossible to read Marx's *German Ideology*, for instance, without coming to terms with the sheer brilliance and clarity of his style. Even with the crumbling of communist states here and there, Marx's writing is read the world over, both for its understanding of capital as well as the way in which the narratives of history and peoples are articulated.

There may be few takers for the view that Emile Durkheim or Max Weber provide the same quality of colour and vibrancy. Yet, as a body of literature that survives time, the resilience of sociologists as litterateurs cannot be denied. To write about marriage and children, property and death is the subject of sociological recording. To write well about the everydayness of existence is another talent entirely. But to be a sociologist one

must be a writer. To teach, one must write. One must read great works of sociology and be in a position to want to write – to change the world one must wish to write, and one must wish that everyone else can read and write as well.

Feminist theory is a distinctive type of sociology which produces its own literature. Many of the criticisms that come from those who call themselves objective, or biased in some other time-honoured way, are significantly around the questions of the sociology of emotion and affect. Is sociology equipped to study affect? Anyone who reads Max Weber would immediately respond to the questions of rationality, values and ethics (and the varieties of combinations of these) to say that indeed this is possible. The Protestant ethic arises out of the regulation of desires, as does modern bureaucracy. Yet the empirical sociologist's questions arise from the maverick nature of social life and activities. Providing an order to reality is only our second

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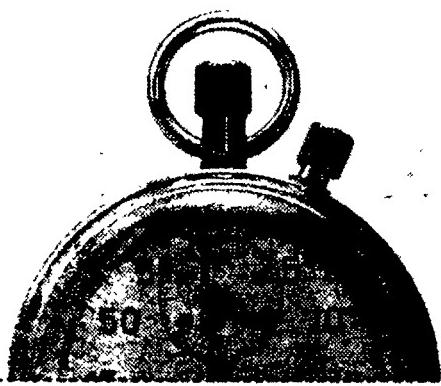
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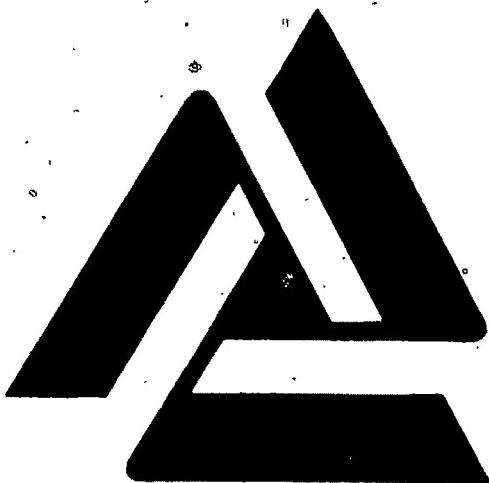
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methodological task; the first is to observe, to record and compare.

Feminism uses the method of bringing that which was silenced to the fore. It contributes substantially to the ways in which a kind of recording takes place that allows balance to be restored. If sociology is the science of combining wisdom and community, then objectivity demands that we see women's voices as crucial to the endeavour of describing what reality is. Sociology, though abstract, is concerned with realism. While we are indebted to the founding fathers of sociology, the search for the voices of women continue in loyalty to the objective pursuits of our art. This is no shifting canvas, there is a certain structuralist paradigm that comes alive: that is the search for meaning. In that sense, recording the voices of women is not significantly or merely a women's task; men are as much part of the venture, and the solidarity and support of men in the task of reconstructing the fabric of sociological narrative is integral.

Women's names, women's work, women's contribution, and the deficit in the structure which contributes to their oppression must be highlighted. It is in this contest that one is grateful to the gender studies programmes in many universities where the shared tasks of analyses have been made evident to men and women faculty as well as students. If there are dangers that men will again speak on behalf of women, it is a risk that we must take, and some of us as women scholars feel that we can safeguard these risks by recording in newspapers, journals or women's meetings the dangers of assimilation.

The writing of fiction, I find, is one of the most interesting metalanguages that sociology can use. That it is a legitimate form of writing sociology has never been doubted by universities wherever sociologists have appeared as writers of fiction. I first began to write fiction because of boredom and the fear of death. These are sociological principles which are catalysts to human behaviour—active and creative. Fifteen years later I find that writing fiction helps me to come to terms with facts that I can no longer footnote diligently as an academic writer. The sociology of fear, boredom, corruption, and Pandora's gift to the world—curiosity and hope—these are difficult to handle through the statistical method. To write prose, poem, essay or play that delineates the human condition is easier to do.

Yet, unlike writing sociology, this kind of writing demands an empty mind. Its creativity arises out of fallowness. This particular condition is available

only to the wealthy, the protected or the renunciant. I fall into any of these categories only marginally. Like seasonal labourers who go out to harvest a crop, the season of work for me as a writer comes into being only when I am on a paid holiday from teaching, scripts, doctoral submissions of students. Such times of idle and fruitful pleasure are rare for me. So I enjoy my busman's holiday when I go on fieldwork, or recuperate from nervous exhaustion, or go on a seminar tour. The chances are that after a break like that I will write forty pages. I am fairly committed to writing, so somehow that one short story or that chapter out of a novella does get written.

A lot of the work that I have done focuses on record keeping as a form of social criticism. I believe that the task of the sociologist is as radical critic, one which in description compels verification as its accompaniment. Those who wish to read what is clearly stated, can act upon its assumptions. With fiction the task is much more subtle, and a lot is said between the lines. This sets up a great deal of controversy because people read texts of fiction very differently from each other, each according to his need, and often each according to his whim. No fiction writer believes that his or her work can be standardized through critical readings. We all form part of concentric rings, each one with a job to do, and our responsibility to our differing audiences is hard to gauge.

As a sociologist I have been interested in working with the Weberian idea that we are actors, that we are agents, that we can transform the world. This creates a methodological space for the analyses of biography. Much of the work I have done presumes against the generally held sociological idea that any one person can change structures. I feel hesitant to say this because I am myself not sure how it works. It draws from the idea of the exemplary hero. I believe that the catalytic agent is able to draw from various sources within himself or herself to actually take on situations where pathologies have become 'normal'. This presumes then that loneliness is an acceptable human and social condition.

It also presumes that such individuals are well able to understand the relationship between themselves and society, that while being detached they are also interventionist.

All my reading has forced me to believe that there is no one point of view and that we are enriched by these ambiguities and differences.

In memoriam

Komal Kothari – more than a treasure

I MET Komal Kothari in 1973 when I was 21 and on my way to the desert land of Jaisalmer to make my first film on the cultural heritage of the area. Before I left, my father, then deeply engrossed in the dream of a new India, said, ‘You can’t go to the desert without meeting Komalji in Jodhpur.’ So I ended up as thousands have at B-II Paota Road in Jodhpur. 31 years have gone by but I remember my first meeting vividly. I was face to face with much more than an encyclopaedia about the fabric of life in these arid areas of Rajasthan. Sharp, finely tuned with an amazing grasp of the nuances that make up India he, in a way, was

my first ‘guru’ to understanding the amazing richness and quality that makes India.

In that first film I made, he networked many connections including the most powerful part of the film – the music of the desert. He came to the locations and every evening we sat under an amazing desert sky listening to an array of folk musicians that mesmerised and captivated like little else can. I worked with Komalji on several films from the 1970s till the early ’80s. He had an amazing ability to give everything of himself to any effort – films, books, music or the wilderness, with expertise and humility.

In myriad ways he remained a constant presence and though I saw little of him from the early '80s to the late '90s, I knew he was always around. I was deeply engrossed with tigers and meanwhile Komalji had turned into one of the greatest legends this country has known.

I went back to see him in the late '90s and we talked of old times and the cultural horrors that confront today's world. When one was with Komalji the delight of cross-fertilisation of ideas, connections and interdisciplinary fields – all this cooked together in ways that were masterful. Komalji was the master of articulating the concoction that makes the reality of India. He could take your breath away with his words and silence you with his depth of vision. It was a treat to just be with him.

I was with him for a few days before he died on 20th April. Something had pushed me to travel to Jodhpur with my family. He had already interacted with my wife and I wanted him to meet my son Hamir. He had been very ill for a few months. Komalji had battled heart problems and cancer but now his kidneys were failing. I sat at his bedside – he was half his physical self but his mind darted effortlessly from field to field as we talked of 'Madhu-Malati', the great folk tale emblematic of the story of the tiger and the blackbuck. In those few days we decided to do a book on this amazing tale – my commitment to a greater understanding of the tiger combined with Komalji's wisdom of the finer details of folklore. We formulated the schedule – I returned to Delhi with several hundred pictures from the old texts and illustrations of Madhu-Malati. After Jodhpur I felt elevated – our trip had been so special that it was beyond definition.

When just days later I heard that he had passed away I was devastated for a while. People like Komalji are more than a national treasure. They are the reason why India is India or why we love it. They are now in such tiny minority that when they depart India shakes just like the tremors of an earthquake – it loses something of its essence because such people are able to touch the roots of this nation. They have the wisdom, depth and ability to interpret the roots – but they also have their great sorrow. For Komalji it was not being able to share this experience with a growing younger generation because most of them don't care.

Komalji was for me a great conduit to the understanding of this country; I could feel it through him. His demise froze me but because of the richness and depth of his presence, his wisdom, his ability to cross-fertilize, he also unfroze me and is a part of my very

being. Yes, I have embarked on the Madhu-Malati book – I will do it. Of course, I will hugely miss Komalji because he was not only someone I treasured through my life but equally because his vision of the Indian reality is a great inspiration for the future of any generation.

Before leaving Jodhpur I drove out to see a tiny bit of wilderness where Komalji was building a folk museum – he insisted that I go at dawn to see the birds, the peacocks, the antelope. I drove there amidst the horrors of modern India and the mining of our precious land – bomb-scarred land, craters, the crimes committed against the earth to make a quick buck, and then came Komalji's oasis. His final words to me were, 'Help me save it – I want to protect this fragment of desert wilderness even an area of 200-300 hectares around my land. I want all the wildlife here to prosper.' It is a never-ending mission to protect, preserve and keep alive the roots that anchor a people and a nation, be it in the cultural context or the natural world. I know that I have been able to feel some of the roots through my link with Komalji. What more can one hope for in life?

Valmik Thapar

Remembering Komalda

I REMEMBER Komalda talking to me with matter-of-fact calm about his father's death rites and ceremonies, which he had observed with meticulous rigour. Acknowledging the family as a vital site for his research, he punctuated his observations with intimate details – for instance, if three people travelling by train are taking the ashes of a dead person to Hardwar, then they will always buy four cups of tea. One cup of tea for the dead person. However, when the relatives of the dead return back home, they will buy only three cups of tea. Measuring his words, Komalda said, 'If you are capable of treating a dead person as a living being immediately after his or her death, then he or she can live for eternity. The dead can be with you forever.'

These words resonate for me as I begin, with difficulty, to reflect on Komalda's death – a death that, on the one hand, was anticipated, but which has yet to sink in. The loss is immeasurable. In this context, how can one commemorate him today? No *shubraj* or panegyric verses, I can hear him mutter. Just get on with the work.

On my last trip to Jodhpur, Komalda took me to the site of his newly imagined ethnographic museum on the edge of the desert. 'Why a museum, Komalda?'

I asked, thinking of all those redundant edifices in India which attempt to preserve the past, even as the past lives and mutates on our streets and in the chaos of our everyday lives. ‘This museum,’ Komalda emphasized, ‘will not have any permanent structure. No walls, no collection. It will simply provide a space for traditional modes of production and processes of work.’ At the heart of his imaginary of the museum was an object that would inaugurate its existence: the *jharu* or household broom.

Till the end, Komalda’s homage to ordinariness was profoundly real. As any of his friends can testify, he had a vast knowledge of the material bases of culture relating to land, water, agriculture, irrigation and livestock. He could name the different kinds of animal dung used as preservatives in the construction of clay pots, and if he talked about *Heer Ranjha*, it was not to relish its poetry but to point out its use as an indigenous quarantine practice during epidemics of foot-and-mouth disease.

Similarly, the *jharu*, for Komaldá, opened up a wealth of knowledge relating to its different materials, working communities, techniques of construction and myths. In certain households, as I learned from him, the *jharu* is actually worshipped as the goddess Lakshmi. And, in some communities – this detail is particularly human – when the broom becomes old, it is not simply thrown away as garbage. Rather, it is set aside gently, unobtrusively, with muted respect.

While listening to Komalda narrate the cultural history of the *jharu* on that last trip to the museum site outside of Jodhpur, I remember us passing a dumping site for animal carcasses. It was a grim and surreal sight – miles and miles of bones, bleached under the sun, with vultures hovering in the sky. Within the skeletal remains of the animals, we saw bright-blue and bright-pink plastic packets wedged between the bones. A ghastly reminder of the ubiquity of plastic in India, which has proliferated almost as virulently as the *vilayati bambul* shrub, appropriately branded as *angreji* or foreign by rural people.

Tellingly, Komalda did not use the example of plastic – eaten, but undigested, by the animals – to launch into an anti-modernity diatribe with which we are so familiar today in contemporary Indian debates around secularism and community. Steeped as he was in the minutiae of rural cultures, and critically aware of the hazardous destruction of traditional water-harvesting systems, among other manifestations of people’s science and technology, Komalda was neither an anti-developmentalist nor an anti-modernist.

In many ways, he was a down-to-earth realist who recognized the extraordinary courage and tenacity embodied in the cultures of survival. With this in mind, I remember him peering into the field of bones and asking, ‘Look carefully, are the horns and hooves of the animals intact?’ He then turned to me and rattled off figures relating to the market price of these bones sold to the glue and pharmaceutical industries. If bone-collecting is a viable business, it is not surprising that there should be communities of bone-collectors from the most downtrodden sections of society. Komalda was the kind of grassroots researcher who did not merely document or commiserate with such communities; rather, he recognized their skills and contribution to society at large.

Scavengers, as he often reminded us, prevent our cities from being buried in garbage; nomadic communities like the Kalbelia contribute to the removal of locusts; the Ghattiwal repair and maintain the *chakki* or grinding stone. This fundamental respect for the technical skills of the downtrodden extended to their music and genealogies, their narratives, performances and epics. Far from instrumentalizing people’s knowledge, Komalda recognized the cultural dimensions animating it.

If there was one leitmotif that ran through his discourse, at least in my experience as a listener, it was the primacy of knowledge. Komalda was at once the most ardent seeker of several systems of undocumented knowledge, and the richest repository of its interconnections. In him we have lost a vital link with living traditions on the ground because he was our most precious and reliable point of reference. And yet, I do believe that the dissemination of his knowledge to a veritable diaspora of musicians, artists, anthropologists, folklorists and ethnomusicologists, scattered in different parts of Rajasthan, India, and the world, has been so profound, that the inspiration of his informal knowledge is still circulating.

If we listen carefully, Komalda is still talking to us. He is urging us not to lose sight of ground realities as we theorize our respective disciplines. Above all, he is telling us to be serious but not to lose our sense of humour or the human dimensions of scholarly research. In our internalization of his many hours of conversation, punctuated with his inimitable digressions and transitions, intuitive leaps and startling logic, I do believe that he is still with us. Like an oral epic, with no fixed beginning or end, Komalda will live forever.

Rustom Bharucha

Backpage

WE are all wiser after the event. So don't be surprised if over the next few weeks you are inundated with sophisticated statistical and semiotic analysis of vote shares, victory/loss margins, swings, anti-incumbency, *jatiya samikaran* and the like with, of course, sneery takes on ad campaigns and slogans. Somewhere, will also be slipped in, 'Didn't I tell you so?' The disconcerting fact is, never publicly admitted, that no one got it right – pollsters and psephologists, astrologers and tarot card readers, politicians and grassroots activists. Economists love the phrase, *ceteris paribus*, everything remaining the same. For electoral number crunchers, the escape route is, 'unless there is a wave'.

At some stage, hopefully before the next elections, we will be better informed about what seems to work, and what not, where. Is it alliances or caste/community combinations, performance or skilful public relations, constantly shuffling the candidate pack or organizational coherence and committed cadre, livelihood or emotional issues, muscle power or money – and the list can be extended *ad infinitum*. All what we can assert with some confidence is that Indian parliamentary elections are no presidential contest; the margin of Atalji's personal standing did not save him from a resounding rejection. Above all that arrogance does not pay. You cannot take the Indian voter for granted.

Chandrababu in Andhra or Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu, Modi in Gujarat or Amarinder Singh in Punjab – each in different ways prisoners of their self-image – should now be a chastened lot. So should Antony in Kerala and Krishna in Karnataka. Everyone has his favourite loser or winner. For me, it is the physicist turned Vedic advocate, Murli Manohar Joshi. His defeat in Allahabad alongside fellow ideologues Vinay Katiyar, Chinmayananda (both in UP) and his snake sporting deputy minister from Bihar will give cheer to more than the beleaguered IIMs. For those concerned about the state of education and learning – at all levels – their departure from centre-stage creates an opportunity to undo the damage they collectively managed to inflict. When read in conjunction with the BJP losses in Gujarat, incidentally in the very same riot-affected areas which propelled it to victory in the state Assembly, it is permissible to imagine a return to sanity.

Much noise is also likely to be made about the rejection of reforms, about distorted visions and misdirected policy which foreground concerns of capital

over labour, cities over the countryside and so on. This may both be premature and mistaken for there is no returning to the past. The managers of the Indian state, across political parties, and in conjunction with affected constituencies, need to re-work their reform packages with fresh centrality accorded to productive livelihood and not the stock market with its dependence on the NRI and foreign institutional investor. Equally, not with as high a component of debt.

To go back to arrogance. The unexpected decline of the NDA may well be because its spin doctors started believing their created hype. But if the Congress, clearly the major gainer of this contest, starts imagining that it is once again the central pole around which the polity operates, it is in for some shock. Not just because, in terms of numbers, it has only come back to where it was in 1996, when Narasimha Rao lost power, and that too after a herculean effort by its president. But equally because of its proclivity to treat all regionally-rooted political players as merely local and not national. This is one key reason why it has rarely been successful in working coalitions in the past and why the BJP, seen by most as more adept on this grid, lost out this time around.

India is a rainbow country and needs to be governed as such. Obsequiousness to a High Command and back-seat driving by individuals, maybe expert and well-meaning, but with no political base and experience of electoral battle, rarely succeeds in an open polity. Nor does deference to moneybags and corporate heavyweights. If the new coalition can keep its hubris in check and create meaningful space for newer and younger actors, in the party(ies) and outside, we may still see the evolution of a new political culture.

We should take some cheer from the fact that Satish Sharma, self-confessed courtier, lost from the pocket borough of Sultanpur despite vigorous campaigning by the Gandhi children and that Naresh Gujral was rejected despite his newly discovered affinity with the victorious Akali Dal in Punjab and his father's self-propelled claims to statesmanship. Also the defeat of musclemen like Pappu Yadav and D.P. Yadav. In this lies the central lesson of 2004 – never take the voters for granted. Even more, continuously work hard at gaining and retaining their trust.

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